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VOLUME FOUR

# YOGA SADHANA PANORAMA



**Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati**

Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

YOGA SADHANA  
PANORAMA  
VOLUME FOUR



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# YOGA SADHANA PANORAMA

VOLUME FOUR

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

*Satsangs and discourses in France 2000,  
Wales 2000, Greece 2000, Mumbai 2001,  
Spain 2001 and Australia 2001, 2002*



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

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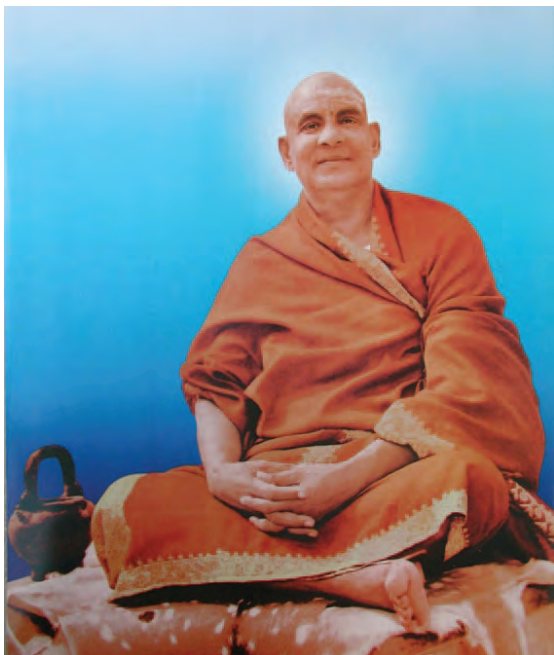
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## Dedication

*In humility we offer this dedication to  
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated  
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga.*



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# R.Y.E. Conference

UNESCO Centre, Paris, France  
March 22, 2000





# Yoga – a Global Culture

Yoga is an ancient, universal culture. Many people think of yoga as Indian or Eastern, but in reality yoga is the heritage of humanity, not part of any oriental or occidental belief system. Evidence dating back thousands of years indicates that before the advent of modern civilization, yoga was practised in the pre-Columbian civilizations of South America, and in past civilizations in Northern Europe, North Africa and Asia, for physical health, mental harmony and spiritual upliftment. We can safely say, therefore, that yoga is a global culture of people who wish to develop their personality, mind and consciousness, and to experience cosmic harmony.

In the course of time, due to changes in the social and global environment, the ancient tradition of yoga was lost in many countries. Yoga was preserved in India and has, therefore, re-emerged from India. For this reason it is often felt that the theories and practices are oriental in nature. However, yoga is a global vision. The development of body, mind and spirit, which is the aim of yoga, is not confined to any country or culture.

## **Evolution of consciousness**

In the last fifty years yoga has emerged from its mystical robes and is now wearing scientific robes. Therefore, it has greater acceptability in society. When we talk about yoga, however, we have to be very clear that it is a system, a collection of

practices, which deals not only with awakening the vital forces, the *prana shakti*, in the human body and mind, but also with the evolution of human consciousness.

In the twentieth century, Carl Jung, the founder of analytical psychology, stated that the images, impressions and symbols that manifest in the mind arise from the deeper layers of human consciousness, the unconscious. His theories influenced the development of modern psychology. However, thousands of years before the advent of psychology, the yogic tradition also described the different states of consciousness as *jagrat*, the conscious mind, *swapna*, the subconscious mind, *nidra*, the unconscious mind, and *turiya*, the superconscious mind. Uniting the different dimensions of human consciousness and mind represents the concept of self-realization.

In Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, the only reference to God is in the form of *Ishwara*, the undecaying, unchanging, constant principle governing creation. As human beings, we experience change and transformation, as we are all governed by the four eternal laws of birth, disease decay and death. However, there is something unchangeable which is not subject to these laws, and that is the transcendental nature, the cosmic being. According to our beliefs and ideas, this cosmic being can be given a name, which is God. Here the word God does not represent a person, but the three qualities of generation – G, organization – O, and destruction, transformation and change – D. It is belief in a power which is constant, eternal and unchanging. Human beings change, but this cosmic power, which is non-human, remains constant. Awareness of this cosmic power and the role it plays in our life is recognized as *samadhi*, the culmination of yoga, or as self-realization. There is recognition that human beings are without restrictions and limitations, and there is great potential for evolving and developing in life.

It should be clear, therefore, that the yogic concept of God is not the religious concept, but the spiritual concept which brings us closer to our nature and provides us with an

understanding of our spiritual dimension. The spirit, the mind and the senses are the three areas of our interactions. In the physical body we interact in the realm of the senses, in the dimension of time, space and object. In the mental dimension we interact with the non-physical senses, in the dimension of space and time. In the spiritual dimension we interact with space only; there is no time and no object, only continuity of consciousness.

It is here that science and spirituality can find a meeting point for discussions. Science says that the fourth dimension is the dimension of time, but the theories from which yoga evolved say that the fourth dimension is space, the ever-evolving spirit. In the physical dimension we are subject to the laws of time, space and object and we act through the senses, which are manifest, physical. In the mental dimension we act with non-physical senses in space and time. In the spiritual dimension there is no object, no time but continuity of space, continuity of consciousness.

### **Integrating head, heart and hands**

Yoga provides us with a process through which we can integrate the various aspects of our personality, harmonizing and realizing the potentials of body, mind and spirit. We all experience the qualities of the head, representing intellect, the qualities of the heart, representing sensitivity, feeling and emotion, and the qualities of the hands, representing performance, creativity and action. These three qualities need to be integrated in order to become a complete human being. Through hatha yoga, raja yoga, kriya yoga, kundalini yoga, mantra yoga, nada yoga, laya yoga and the other systems of yoga, we make an effort to awaken the faculties of head, heart and hands.

The practice of yoga cannot be uniform for everybody. Modern psychology also states that there are different traits in the human personality. Some people are dynamic by nature, some are emotional, some are intellectual and others are psychic and spiritual by nature. Our actions and thoughts are guided by whichever trait is predominant in our personality.

Therefore, the application of yoga will differ according to the type of personality we are dealing with. For this reason, yoga has always maintained that to achieve perfection there has to be direct contact with a teacher, with a master, who can recognize our needs and aspirations, and who can guide us along the path to fulfilment. Before we become aware of our inner needs, a foundation has to be created, which is the general application of yoga.

The physical dimensions of yoga provide us with health and harmony. The mental dimensions provide us with the ability to relax, to focus and to become more creative. The spiritual dimensions indicate the process and path by which we can return to our source – the spirit. Just as the body is nourished by food and the mind by enjoyment, without which they will become weak and sick, similarly our spirit is also nourished by restraint and awareness of our inner nature, without which the spirit will become sick. Spiritual strength will diminish and that will be the death, not of the human being, but of life as we know it.

To harmonize these dimensions, yoga developed the physical practices of *asana*, postures, and *pranayama*, breathing techniques, and the hatha yoga cleansing techniques. To improve the health and harmony of the inner mind, there are the raja yoga practices of *pratyahara*, withdrawing and freeing the mind from the senses, and *dharana*, concentration, as well as mantra yoga and kriya yoga. In order to awaken the inner spiritual strength, the system of *dhyana*, meditation, taps the dormant or inaccessible areas of human consciousness.

### **Become a superbeing**

When we look at our present civilization, we find we are all struggling. In our struggle we encounter success and failure, personal and social, psychological and familial, which influences our behaviour and our mind. Swami Sivananda used to say, “Nature throws a man into the crucible of pain in order to turn him into a sublime superman.” Struggle is a natural part of life. Struggle indicates the drive and the

motivation by which we can overcome our limitations. It indicates the journey towards happiness, satisfaction and fulfilment. If we accept struggle as challenge and we are not subdued by the influences of tension and stress, then a new person emerges, which is the superman, the superbeing. This has been the guiding principle of yoga.

Teaching asana and pranayama is not the aim of yoga. The aim is to overcome the struggles and find happiness, to accept and enjoy the struggles, knowing that the outcome will be much more pleasant, optimistic and beneficial. When there is acceptance of struggle, there is joy. This is the philosophy of yoga. See your life, not as full of pain and suffering, limitation and restriction, but as a means to attain *satyam, shivam, sundaram*, truth, auspiciousness and beauty.

### **Role of samskara**

To develop this type of mentality, the seeds need to be planted at an early age. This type of perception is the outcome of appropriate samskaras. The word samskara is usually understood as an impression, but traditionally *samskara* means the expression of an integrated and harmonious personality. Samskaras provide us with an understanding of how we can integrate and harmonize our personality. The wisdom and knowledge that leads us to this experience is samskara. The seed of samskara has to be planted when one is young so that the concept of yoga – harmony, integration and unity – becomes part of every individual's life.

In 1995, we established an institution in India called Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal (BYMM), the Children's Yoga Fellowship. It began with five children aged between seven and fifteen, and today has a membership of nearly 40,000 children from all over India. One of the tasks of BYMM is to monitor the children's performance as they practise yoga. In December 1999, BYMM had a core group of 2,225 yoga propagators or teachers, and 350 yoga instructors, all aged seven to fourteen. These children teach yoga to other children all over India.



When children teach other children, there is greater acceptability because children teach each other as friends. The Children's Yoga Fellowship was established to bring yoga to children as an experience of play and joy, without the influence of adults, parents and professional teachers. It is emerging as a movement where the needs of young children can be met by providing them with the right impressions, so that they can confront situations in the future with greater flexibility, adaptability, serenity and happiness. In this way, yoga is slowly being introduced into schools. It is the schools that have the responsibility for developing better human beings for the continuation of our civilization.

### **Effects of yoga practice on children**

In 1999, at Ganga Darshan, a four month study was conducted into the effects of yoga practices on the personality development and cognitive abilities of children. The dimensions studied were memory, creativity, self-confidence, self-esteem and personal discipline. Seven hundred children between the ages of eleven and fifteen from local schools participated. Random selection was made of 350 children, who formed the experimental group and were trained in yoga practices by Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal. Another 350 children were placed in the control group, which did not undergo yoga training.

All the participants were pre-tested to determine a base score for memory, creativity, self-confidence and self-esteem. Post-testing was carried out after a four-month period. During the four months, the experimental group practised surya namaskara (salute to the sun), shashank-bhujangasana (striking cobra pose), sarvangasana (shoulder stand pose), bhramari pranayama (humming bee breath), nadi shodhana (alternate nostril breathing) and trataka (fixed gazing). Their home practice was monitored regularly and they practised as a group at Ganga Darshan on alternate Sundays.

The overall results of the study indicate that the experimental group, which practised yoga, showed a more positive increase on all dimensions than the control group,

which did not practise yoga. On two types of memory tests, one measuring attention/concentration, delayed recall, immediate recall and retention of dissimilar pairs, and another measuring mental balance, visual retention, remote memory and recognition, the yoga or experimental group showed greater improvement. On measures of creativity, they showed a substantial gain in fluency and flexibility. On the self-confidence and self-esteem questionnaires, where the children estimated their intelligence, emotional balance, character, social skills and attractiveness, the yoga trained group showed a greater range of change. They also showed a remarkable change in general discipline as assessed by their parents.

### **Yoga in schools**

This study has given us hope that if yoga is applied systematically, and we can assess the development of a child's personality properly, it can be concluded that yoga is a must for harmonious and integrated growth. It has been an important experiment, and we plan to continue such experiments involving students in primary school, high school and college. We are currently working with the National Institute of Educational Planning in India to prepare a yoga syllabus which can be taught in primary schools, middle schools, high schools and colleges.

Our approach has been similar to R.Y.E. (Research on Yoga in Education). We teach one posture and one breathing technique to children at the beginning of every class. The asana is *tadasana*, the palm tree pose, and the pranayama is *nadi shodhana*, alternate nostril breathing. These two practices do not take much time. You can stand beside your desk and practise *tadasana*, which provides traction to the whole body, realigns the stress caused by compression of the spine, and eliminates blockages in the *nadis*, the nerve plexuses, ensuring greater circulation of vitality. Just as blood is circulated throughout the body through a network of nerves, arteries and veins, in the yogic understanding of the human body, energy is also circulated by a network of nerves known

as pranic nadis. Asanas, especially the simplest ones involving traction, stretching, lateral stretch, and twisting, help to relieve tensions and blockages, allowing proper circulation of blood and energy throughout the entire body.

The mental attention is focused through the practice of alternate nostril breathing, a simple technique in which the children are asked to visualize the flow of the breath in and out at the time of inhalation and exhalation, with retention in between. We have observed that as a result of these practices, children become free from the physical and psychological stresses that they accumulate unconsciously as they grow up.

### **SWAN principle in education**

The mind is not like a rubber band which can be stretched to its limits. The more you stretch a rubber band, the more likely it is to snap. We do not treat a human being as having infinite abilities. Each one of us has certain strengths which need to be developed and certain weaknesses which need to be overcome. If we analyze our own life, what do we see? Despite having all the strengths and force of character, the weaknesses hold us back. Often, despite everything going in the right direction, we are unable to move forward.

The SWAN principle applies to every personality. S represents strength, W represents weakness, A represents ambition and N represents needs. We swing between strength and weakness, and between ambition and need. Sometimes it is very hard to differentiate between a strength and a weakness, or to distinguish between an ambition and a need.

Yoga plays a major role in managing this swing of the pendulum in a systematic way. It is a process of self-awareness, recognition and relaxation. Relaxation comes from within; it is not something that can be achieved outside. Scientific investigations have shown that even in deep sleep we are unable to relax completely. If we are able to relax, and to analyze and observe these different dimensions of personality, which we call the SWAN principle, then there can be greater

understanding of our needs, ambitions and perceptions, and how to manage them in a more effective and efficient way. And that will make us better human beings.

Therefore, yoga's contribution to education is not confined to schools. Education is a life-long process of learning, and harmonizing the learning with performance. We need to look at the theory and concept of education in this light. Yoga in education is the first step in improving the expressions, behaviour and qualities of our civilization.



# Yoga and Addiction

European Yoga Fellowship,  
Satyanandashram, Paiania, Greece  
March 24–26, 2000





# Yoga Today

Welcome to the world of yoga. The European Yoga Fellowship (EYF) was created in order to propagate the application of yoga in society. People associated with yoga are aware of the many ways in which yoga can be applied to improve our lives, our society and the world in which we live, but those not familiar with yoga tend to have misconceptions. The EYF provides a forum where research on yoga can be discussed and disseminated.

The misunderstandings about yoga that exist in western countries also exist in India. India is a multi-ethnic society, including Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Buddhists, all with their own beliefs, and these different views also colour the understanding of people involved in administration and government. Nevertheless, yoga has been applied in many areas of society, and Bihar School of Yoga endeavours to make yoga more accessible to the public through branch institutions.

## **Exploring creative potential**

Yoga is not only a philosophy, but also an expression of human creativity. Yoga is separate from our personal life, such as sannyasa. It is a system by which we can explore and express our potential and creativity, and thus enrich our lives. Balanced behaviour, creative expression and the right attitude represent the needs of human civilization and every individual who is part of that civilization. This is the perspective of yoga in the present day and age.



When we think of balanced behaviour and creative expression and look at the social environment, it is obvious that there is some disparity and imbalance. When we think of integrated thought, we find that people tend to view themselves and others through a tube known as tunnel vision. These limited expressions do not allow us to develop a higher perspective or vision. However, this is not a phenomenon of the modern world. Such an environment has existed in the past and will continue to exist in the future. Nevertheless, it represents the human effort to achieve wisdom and creativity. In traditional language, the attainment of wisdom and creativity can be described as realization, but in the present day context it represents the human effort to achieve and to realize the inherent truth, auspiciousness and beauty of life.

### **Practical yoga**

It is with this inspiration and vision that we step into the new millennium. In the twentieth century yoga was seen as something personal that one could do to attain health and happiness. About fifty years ago a practical approach to yoga began to emerge. Although many people had written on the subject of yoga, it was theory only. Sri Aurobindo spoke on yoga, but the emphasis was not on the practical aspects. Swami Vivekananda also spoke on yoga, but without the physical applications. In those days, people were possibly not ready to accept the practical approach of yoga, and therefore the saints and seers provided philosophical concepts and definitions of yoga.

In the 1950s some yogis started teaching the practical aspects of yoga, but the practices were thought to be for spiritual enlightenment only. Later, as people experienced physical health and wellbeing, the concept changed and yoga was seen as a method of acquiring physical fitness and vitality. Then there was a jump from the physical to the mental aspect through meditation. Meditation was seen as a type of miracle which could lead to immediate enlightenment. As people meditated, they discovered it was possible to control

the dissipations of the mind, as well as to attune themselves with their psychic and spiritual nature.

In the meantime, some thinkers and professionals began to investigate the effects of yoga on the human personality. Yoga was then divided into two branches: objective and subjective. As yoga teachers mushroomed around the world, people who came to yoga classes had personal experiences which were subjective by nature. Professionals in different fields conducted objective analyses of yoga, which became another branch of yogic discoveries. However, the time has now come where we need to understand yoga in its totality, as it is applicable for the improvement and development of the human personality.

At present in India, we are teaching yoga in prisons, industries, schools, sporting associations, hospitals and the army. These applications of yoga involve the development of human resources for greater productivity. The immediate need of human civilization is not the awakening of kundalini. Before we can understand the concept of kundalini, we need to cover a lot of ground. Kundalini represents the universal application of yogic wisdom. However, integrating the practices into society represents the primary and secondary systems of education. We need to understand the different levels of yogic education in the right perspective. At this stage of life, we are not ready for the experience of kundalini, or for the experience of samadhi. If it happens well and good, it will mean we have passed all the examinations of the previous classes, but in the meantime we have many miles to go before we rest.

## **Addiction**

The theme selected for this gathering is 'Yoga and Addiction'. Addiction can be seen in two ways: from a personal viewpoint and from a social viewpoint. The social dimensions of addiction are well known and we do not need to define them. From a personal viewpoint, addiction represents a weakening of willpower, being influenced by feelings of insecurity, feeling an emotional and social vacuum, experiencing a lack of love

and support, loss of clarity and direction in life. These factors lead people to look for inner sustenance through different forms of addiction.

Think about the statement: habits die hard. Look at the kind of habits you have, not necessarily in relation to drugs, but in general. How have you attempted to transform or change these habits? How successful have you been? Cigarette smoking is an addiction, watching television is an addiction, lethargy is an addiction and sometimes even depression can be an addiction. Negativity can be addictive and optimism can be addictive. Which habits have an influence on you and how? Let us also discuss yoga and addiction along these lines.

# Yoga and Addiction

What causes addiction? The main reason is lack of willpower. The second reason is feeling a vacuum in life, an absence of joy and happiness, a lack of external social and family support, love and affection. The third reason is not having an aim in life, which leads to addiction to various forms of stimulation through which an aim based on fantasy is created. The fourth reason is the desire to experiment with something new.

## **Influence of the three gunas**

The human personality has two parts: one which expresses happiness and creativity, and another which is depressive and introverted. These two aspects are part and parcel of our nature and behaviour. In yogic terminology, the three qualities which influence the mind are the sattwic, rajasic and tamasic gunas. On the minus side, tamas indicates stagnation, rajas represents aggression and sattwa is the desire for change. On the plus side, tamas indicates recognition of the state we are in at present, rajas represents the vitality which can help us transcend the stagnation, and sattwa is the achievement of transcendence. If we consider rajas, which is dynamism and motivation, as being common to every human being, then it seems we only have to move between the two poles of tamas, or stagnation, and sattwa, or transcendence. Sattwa represents a pure, balanced and harmonious approach to life.

It is the nature of the human personality to be drawn to the tamasic aspect, to stagnation. Look at your own lives for a moment and ask yourself whether it is possible to learn anger, hatred, jealousy or greed in any school of philosophy or academic institution. We do not learn these emotions anywhere; they are spontaneous expressions of human nature. People attend different schools of thought in order to learn how to be loving, kind and compassionate, or to learn how to find a transformative balance. This indicates that the negative trends of our personality express themselves naturally and spontaneously, while the positive trends need to be worked on.

By nature, we have a negative mentality or pull in our personality. Yoga attempts to convert this negativity into harmony, equanimity and balance, into sattwa. At the mental and emotional levels, yoga works to transform the negativity into positivity. At the physical level, yoga works to remove the imbalances and provide an experience and understanding of health and wellbeing.

### **Stabilizing the mind**

Why does the mind become weak? From every angle, whether from a psychological or a personal point of view, it is clear that we are governed by distractions which prevent the mind from becoming stable and peaceful. In yogic terminology, the distractions which affect the mind are known as *vruttis*. The state of peace and stability we can experience in yoga is known as *samadhi*.

It has been stated in the *Yoga Sutras* of Sage Patanjali that when you begin to focus or concentrate the mind, each stable nature of the mind represents a meditative state. The processes of mind management in the *Yoga Sutras* are *pratyahara*, *dharana* and *dhyana*. In this context, *pratyahara* represents the state of mental and psychological relaxation and external and sensorial harmony. Perfection of *pratyahara* is determined not by how long you are able to meditate or remain focused, but by how well you can develop natural skills to remain relaxed and focused in adverse situations.

The more you are at peace with yourself in the most difficult situations, the more you perfect pratyahara.

It is said that if you are able to maintain a state of pratyahara for three hours continuously, then you will move into the state of *dharana*, which is deep concentration. The tradition says that three pratyaharas equal one dharana, three dharanas equal one dhyana, and three dhyanas equal one samadhi. What are these three pratyaharas? Three hours of the same state of mind, or continuity of experience, leads to a deepening of concentration. Three hours of continuous concentration in which there is no fluctuation or dissipation of the mind leads to deep meditation or *dhyana*. Three hours of continuous dhyana, or absolute identification with the inner nature, leads to the state of *samadhi*, fusion or union with the inner nature.

It is easy to say these things, but it is extremely hard to do them because it is the nature of the mind to be distracted or dissipated at all times. Imagine a monkey that cannot sit still. We cannot compare our mind to a monkey because sometimes it is possible for a monkey to become quiet. Now imagine the same monkey drunk, so it becomes hyperactive. We cannot compare our mind to a drunken monkey because a drunken monkey can go to sleep. Now imagine a monkey that has drunk a bottle of champagne and has also been bitten by a scorpion. That monkey is our mind! We are dealing with such heightened monkey activity. The monkey can be controlled by holding it down, but there is no way to hold down the mind. Therefore, the system of raja yoga provides a process through which we can avoid the distractions and dissipations of the mental energies.

### **Awareness of strengths and weaknesses**

As we relax there is also an increase in self-awareness. Possibly self-awareness is the key in yoga, because as we become aware of the functions of our nature and are able to guide it properly, we experience harmony. As we learn how to relax a little more, we are able to differentiate between our strengths and our weaknesses. Normally we desire strengths,

but we identify with our weaknesses. This is a point of conflict in everybody's life. We desire something, but we are restricted by the same quality and nature of the mind. We desire security and safety, but insecurity prevents us from finding it. There is a continual conflict between strengths and weaknesses at deep conscious and unconscious levels. We desire love, appreciation and security, but we cannot find them within and so we search for them outside. When we begin searching outside, we lose contact with our inner source. Our mind becomes clouded and we adopt various measures that we feel will help us attain security and comfort.

### **Strengthening willpower by releasing obsessive compulsions**

It is important to have the ability to be objective with oneself. Objectivity does not mean making a controversial or obsessive-compulsive self-analysis. The drive to find comfort, safety and security in the outer dimension leads to the generation of compulsive and obsessive behaviour. What we see here is the desire to be happy, for example. We desire happiness, but when we can find nothing inside to be happy about, then we look outside.

The outer search becomes an obsession which compels us to look in different directions. Obsession is a state of mind in which we crave ego fulfilment and satisfaction. Compulsion is the drive to achieve that obsession, the motivation to fulfil what we lack within ourselves. It seems like a vicious circle, from inside to outside, to compulsive and obsessive behaviour. The first thing that happens is the destruction of inner peace. However, if we can maintain our inner harmony, all our habits can change.

Take the example of smoking. Suppose you smoke cigarettes and want to give them up. It may be due to the statement on the box which says that smoking is injurious to health, or it may be because you know that smoking causes lung cancer, or just a simple thought like, "Why should I blacken my lungs with smoke?" Whatever the reason, you find that you are unable to stop smoking and have become

addicted. If you try to give it up, the mind returns to that desire again and again unless you have very strong willpower and do not think about it. Therefore, we say that habits die hard, because the desire for another cigarette is due to a weakening of willpower. Once your willpower is weakened, you cannot move out of that state of mind. So, the first thing you need to do is to generate willpower and vitality, which can alter the mental state of desiring and craving.

### **Research into yoga and addiction**

Most of the research in which yoga practices have been applied to overcome different forms of addiction has several common principles. The common practices are asana and pranayama, which lead to vitality of the body and brain; the techniques of deep relaxation which aim to relax the inner agitations of the mind; some of the techniques of pratyahara which help to focus the mind; and some of the more advanced techniques to analyze the expressions of the mind.

These investigations into the effects of yoga on addiction are invaluable for our body of knowledge. However, one point modern researchers have missed is the depth of compulsion and obsession in the personality, which alters the desires and behaviour. Investigations carried out in the USA and India indicate that where there is a heavy dependence on alcohol, dynamic asanas can be used to overcome that dependence. Where there is a desire to stop smoking marijuana, gentle yogic techniques can be used to create a change.

In our investigations, we looked at the degree of obsessiveness in the personality before teaching people yoga. We adopted different approaches for a growing personality and an established personality. This can act as a reference point for further research into yoga, because right now we are using the same sledgehammer to hit all kinds of addictions. Light addictions only need a gentle hammer whereas heavy addictions need maybe a twenty-pound sledgehammer.

If we follow the principle that says fight fire with fire, poison with poison, then accordingly we have to fight



addiction with addiction. The so-called negative addictions can be easily managed through positive addictions. Therefore, let us become addicted to the joys of life and appreciate life. We are always influenced by the negative addictions. Today let ourselves be influenced by the positive addictions.

# The Role of Meditation in Changing Habits

The management of addiction has been the topic of much research. An investigation carried out in the 1980s provides some important indicators about the role of meditation in helping to change habits. A study was conducted from January to June 1982 at the Gladman Memorial Centre, California, USA. Dr Tod Mikuriya and I decided to experiment with meditation in the management of mental habits by observing the effects of meditation practice on marijuana smokers. The subjects were seventy young males aged between fifteen and twenty-two, selected on the basis of their history of marijuana smoking.

The criterion for improvement was no longer having the desire to smoke marijuana. The experiment consisted of a thirty-minute meditation class conducted daily for six months. The class began with five minutes of shavasana, followed by twenty minutes of ajapa japa meditation and concluded with five minutes of Om chanting.

## **Relaxation practice**

At the beginning of the class the students were asked to lie down and relax, while we took them through the practice of progressive relaxation in shavasana for five minutes. The sequence involves relaxation of the entire physical body, then awareness of the breath in the abdominal region, expansion of the abdomen with inhalation and relaxation of the abdomen with exhalation. The students were asked to release any

tension from the body by becoming limp like a rag doll. We would then check to see if any tension was being held by lifting up different parts of the body. This deep relaxation was induced for five minutes.

### **Ajapa japa practice**

After the relaxation practice, the students were asked to sit in a meditative posture, keeping their eyes closed. Initially some students would open their eyes, and so we gave them eye patches to wear to prevent any visual stimulation affecting the state of relaxation in the brain. We then guided the students through the practice of ajapa japa for twenty minutes.

In ajapa japa practice, deepening of concentration and internalization of awareness takes place. We began by witnessing the flow of the natural breath in the nasal passage. The actual flow of the breath in the nostrils was experienced by focusing the mind on the temperature of the breath during inhalation and exhalation, intensifying awareness of the cool sensation within the nostrils at the time of inhalation and of the warm sensation at the time of exhalation.

Concentration on the temperature of the air going in and out of the nostrils helps to balance the activities of the two hemispheres of the brain. In hatha yoga it is said that the flow of the breath is connected with activation of the left and right hemispheres of the brain. Research has shown that the flow of the breath in the two nostrils stimulates and alters the functions of the brain hemispheres. The flow in the right nostril stimulates the left hemisphere and the flow in the left nostril stimulates the right hemisphere.

In yogic theory, the right nostril is the location of *pingala nadi*, the source of heat and vitality, and the left nostril is the location of *ida nadi*, the source of coolness and tranquillity. It was our contention that if we were able to merge the mind with the experience of breathing and the temperature of the breath, it would be possible to induce changes in the brain wave patterns. This change can be achieved through

concentration and awareness that one is breathing in and out, and observing the temperature of the breath.

You can also try this experiment yourself in an environment where there is a lot of stimulation and stress. At home or at work, when you are mentally and emotionally fatigued, feeling tired and drained of vitality, and there is nervous, muscular and emotional tension, simply close your eyes for a few minutes. Watch the flow of the breath in the nostrils and observe the temperature of the breath. You will feel calmer and more in control of yourself and your expressions. This experiment will allow you to experience the change in the pattern of the brain waves, which you will feel subjectively as greater relaxation and control over the personal, emotional and intellectual expressions.

After observing the breath in the nostrils, the students were then asked to become aware of the movement of the breath in the frontal passage between the nose and the navel. Normally, when we breathe in, the air goes down into the lungs and when we breathe out, the air comes up out of the lungs. However, in the practice of *ajapa japa* we reverse the awareness factor. At the time of inhalation the students had to imagine the breath was ascending from the navel to the nostrils and at the time of exhalation that the breath was descending from the nostrils to the navel. This practice internalized their attention and awareness so deeply that there would come a time when they stopped hearing the external noises, although their ears were not blocked. By keeping the eyes closed or by wearing eye patches, there was visual deprivation, and by observing the flow of the breath there was a reduction in auditory perception.

We then introduced the component of mantra repetition with the breath. In *ajapa japa* the mantra *So Ham* is used. *So* represents the sound of inhalation and *Ham* represents the sound of exhalation. The mantra creates a change in the vibratory dimension of the personality, which has the effect of making the mind more focused, tranquil and peaceful. After the students had practised mantra repetition with the breath for five to seven minutes, we ended the practice of *ajapa japa*.

The students then chanted Om verbally for five minutes, still keeping their eyes closed. This ended the thirty minute class.

### **Improvements observed**

The criterion selected for improvement was no longer having the desire to smoke marijuana. During the six months of meditation practice, the majority of students showed this improvement. After one month of meditation practice, six reported that they no longer felt any desire to smoke, and three had reduced their intake. After two months, another ten reported that they had stopped smoking, and twenty that they were smoking less. After three months, a further nineteen reported that they had reduced their smoking, and fourteen no longer wanted to smoke. After four months, another eight reported that they had stopped, and six that they were smoking less. After five months, another eleven had reduced their smoking, and ten reported they had stopped. At the end of the six months, another seven no longer had the desire to smoke, four more had reduced their intake and eleven still showed no change. So during the six months, fifty-five of the initial seventy students reported no longer having any desire to smoke marijuana.

### **Family background**

While most subjects improved, a few did not. In order to find out why, Dr Mikuriya decided to investigate the family backgrounds. It was found that the eleven students who had shown no improvement had major family problems. There were cases of violence in the family, or parental separation and divorce, and the children had been left to fend for themselves, with no source of affection, support and security. It has been our experience that people from very disturbed family backgrounds can be helped in an ashram environment. For such people, the ashram provides an environment of security and care which helps them to manage their habits and addictions more efficiently.

Another interesting point to emerge was that the fifty-five subjects who had shown improvement all came from good

family environments, with parental support and consideration from other family members. They reported that they had been lured into smoking with the idea of experimenting with something new.

### **Role of meditation**

We often tend to think that meditation is a process of spiritual enlightenment or greater spiritual understanding, but meditation is a very broad subject. In English, the word 'meditation' represents a state of mental attention. It is not a means of attaining tranquillity, but a method of becoming more attentive internally. We can even say that mental attention equals meditation. When you become attentive internally, you are forced to become a witness to what is transpiring in your inner personality. If I ask you to observe your thoughts, what are you doing? You are not in a deep meditative state when you are observing your thoughts, but you have become alert and aware of a mental process.

Yoga says that nobody has been able to experience meditation, only varying degrees of concentration, focusing and alertness. Nobody can experience meditation because it is a state of mind beyond the realm of time, space and object. So we do not meditate. We try to understand what we are feeling in the realm of emotions and intellect, and the social influences on our personality.

Swami Satyananda has said many times that in the state of meditation, the meditator, the object of meditation and the experience of meditation become one. When we begin yoga, we see the three clear divisions of pratyahara, dharana and dhyana. These practices indicate the development of an attentive awareness that makes us realize our inner and outer interactions. Once we become attentive to our own difficulties and limitations, then we are able to manage them more spontaneously and naturally. If there is a psychological imbalance, a feeling of not being loved or wanted, of being restricted, then when you begin to observe that imbalance, you naturally find a balance. In yoga philosophy, attentive awareness is recognized as the observer, the *drashta* or the seer.

The process of yoga allows us to perceive ourselves in a natural, optimistic way. Difficulties come when we are unable to understand a problem and our responses to it. All our expressions then become reactions to something we cannot adjust to. We react to our family, our social conditioning, our social environment, and we react against ourselves by becoming self-destructive. In order to appreciate the qualities within ourselves and to understand the situations that influence us, self-observation and awareness of personal responses is very necessary, and that can happen through meditation practices.

The lesson is that there is no escaping from realities. We must understand and accept whatever exists within and around us. Therefore, adjust, adapt and express the best in yourself.

# Satsang

**In trying to overcome addiction, how does one start when the mind is dissipated and addicted to so many bad habits, not only to drugs? What are the first steps?**

The patient's or sufferer's recognition that he or she is under the influence of an addiction is one factor. The type of therapy that is followed, whether it is medication or yoga, is another. However, recognizing that one is suffering from an addiction and adopting a process to overcome the addiction is not the complete approach. A different understanding of the mind has to be created and instilled in the sufferer with the help of the therapist.

The common form of treatment is to go to a therapist or yoga teacher and say, "Look, I have this problem. Can you help me?" They will give some medication or a set of practices to do, and that is the end of it. In both situations it is like saying, "If you have a headache, take an aspirin and see me tomorrow morning." There has to be an understanding of the functions of one's mind. We have to provide a direction for the mind to express itself while it is undergoing therapy. The focus should be on the positive aspects of life, where there can be some artistic expression.

Along with therapy, if we can suggest the development of a hobby like painting, music or sculpture, it will provide more focus for personal expression. When you are fully involved and engrossed in the hobby, you will not feel the need to take any stimulants that can be addictive. Having



a positive hobby also helps to manage desires of a self-destructive nature.

**When someone takes psychotropic substances, why do they no longer have a need for food or sleep?**

Whenever we take any kind of drug, there is a chemical change in the body and brain. Sometimes it is hyper-stimulation and sometimes it is a slump. Research using topographical images of the brain waves has shown that when someone is in a drug or alcohol induced stupor, the brain's activities are highly disturbed. As the effect of the drug begins to wear off, suddenly the person comes out of the stupor and realizes that he has not relaxed or slept, and once again he is hyper. The chemical imbalances create a disturbance in the normal biorhythms of the body. This is the basic understanding. Learning to relax can help this situation. Some people have used the practice of yoga nidra to rectify such chemical, physiological and cerebral imbalances. There is something we can try for our own particular condition and situation.

**When someone is addicted, but doesn't make any effort to free themselves from their dependency, how can we help them? Just by practising yoga can something change?**

Yoga has said that we have the power to project positive thoughts to help others, just as we have the power to project negative thoughts to destroy others. This is seen in the chanting of mantras and in the practice of prana vidya. If we look at an image or photograph of a person and chant the mantra with the desire to help that person overcome certain problems, then the positive support we are extending and expressing does create some sort of psychological influence, and they begin to come out of that state.

In the practice of prana vidya, we awaken, channel and direct our vital force. If we project the right form of energy to a person over a distance of many, many miles, even hundreds and thousands of miles, that energy can help the person. This is not scientifically substantiated, but in the ashram in Munger

we chant the Mahamrityunjaya mantra every Saturday night for those people who write and tell us they are suffering and need help. Before chanting the mantra, we read out their names and problems. We have had reports from people saying that they started feeling better on the day and at the time the mantra was being chanted, although they did not know beforehand that the mantra would be chanted on that date. We should try to understand that not everything can be fitted into the compartment of logic, but that there are some non-logical things that help transform us as well.

**If one fears losing a loved one and gets panicky about it, what should one do? How can one deal with it?**

If it is not a problem-related fear, then see it from a different angle. When it is a natural or spontaneous attachment, and the fear is losing the attachment, our approach and attitude have to be different. There is a continuous disparity or imbalance between the reality which surrounds us and the attachments and aspirations which we develop within us.

Some realities in life are universal. Birth, sickness, decay and death are universal phenomena. We know this, yet despite knowing the reality, people do not wish to accept it. Knowing that death is imminent, people do not want to die, and try everything possible to remain alive and become immortal. Despite knowing that things come and go, we cling to them and do not allow them to go.

There has to be an understanding of our aspirations and responses to how we wish to direct our life. In problem-related situations, this attachment takes the form of compassion. In self-oriented situations, it is an attachment. The sense of insecurity and loss disturbs the human mind. Losing somebody we love affects our mind. Our inner clarity becomes even more clouded. We can avoid becoming panicky through meditation. Meditation has to become a process of acknowledging the reality. Meditation should also become a process of adapting to one's attachments so that the loss, insecurity and fear are understood in the right perspective, and do not create an obsessive, psychotic state of mind.

**Our families often ask us if there is a way of overcoming addiction to yoga. How should we answer them?**

There are two types of addiction. One is positive and uplifting and the other is destructive and negative. Art is a positive addiction for artists, but if it becomes the cause of financial loss and disturbance in the family environment, then art can also become a destructive addiction. Science is an addiction, music is an addiction. The desire for happiness is an addiction. The desire to avoid suffering is an addiction.

Addiction is a condition of mind which propels your behaviour and actions. In the negative aspect it is bad, in the positive aspect it is creative. Even yoga can be a positive addiction for some and a negative addiction for others. If you are planning a robbery, you do not declare your intention beforehand. However, if you are planning to find some jewels within by practising meditation, you declare your intention beforehand by saying, “Look, I am practising yoga and becoming a saint.” When we think that a thought or action will increase our prestige, we start talking about it right from stage one. Swami Satyananda used to say that you don’t have to declare that you practise yoga. Just make yoga a natural part of your life.

# Being Natural

There is a story about a master who was wandering around the country with some of his followers. During his travels he came to Athens, where there was a fair with an archery contest. People from all parts of Europe had come to this fair and they wanted the master to participate so that they could observe his skills. The winner of the competition would receive a stone block from the Acropolis to take home. The master was not really interested, saying, "What would I do with a big piece of rock in my ashram?" But his disciples said, "It would look very nice and you could use it as a seat. It is our desire to take that piece of the Acropolis back to India."

Somehow the master was persuaded to compete with the other archers. Each participant was given three arrows to shoot at the target, which was seventy metres away, the distance used in the Olympics. Many attempts were made, but some arrows fell short of the mark and others went beyond the mark. When the master's turn came, a big crowd gathered to see this famous Indian participate in the contest. He picked up an arrow, positioned his body, checked the direction of the wind, the humidity of the air, made sure his arrow was straight, adjusted his cap and very proudly let fly an arrow. Despite all these precautions, the arrow was off target by about thirty or forty metres. The crowd started laughing and giggling.

However, the master had a bright disciple, who said, "There must be a reason why the arrow was off target." He

posed a question to the master, “Oh great one, you are so focused and concentrated. How did your arrow go off target?” The master replied, “The person who shot the arrow was overconfident and when you are overconfident and do not focus properly, it is very easy to lose aim.” When the crowd heard this, they fell silent.

Then the master picked up the second arrow. This time the arrow went less than half way and fell to the ground. Again there was laughter from the crowd. The disciple came to the rescue, asking, “Master, tell us who shot that arrow?” The master replied, “Well, when you are overconfident and miss your aim, you lose confidence. When you lose confidence, you are never true to your direction and fall short of the target.”

The master then picked up the last arrow, and without looking left or right, up or down, he simply let it fly. And surprise of surprises, the arrow went straight to the centre of the target. The master told the disciple to pick up the rock and carry it back to India. Then he started to walk away. Many people in the crowd were impressed by his wisdom and asked, “Before you go, please tell us who shot the third arrow?” The master looked at them and said, “That was the natural me!”

### **Removing the masks**

This story indicates the process of unmasking oneself, of removing the different masks that we wear in our lives. People find it very hard to become natural. They have to identify with something, either with their ego projections or with their emotional or intellectual projections, and they become that for the time being. The natural person never really manifests.

We are always projecting ourselves in different ways, in every situation, whether it is a social event or we are simply at home with our family. When we are constantly trying to project ourselves, we create certain identities with which we associate deeply. We always have this inner drive to be recognized as unique, so we try to project the personality

in a way that makes us superior to other people. Priority in performance, or in intelligence, or in expressions, or in creativity, is our drive.

We swing between the two poles of overconfidence and lack of confidence. Both states destroy our inner harmony and peace, leading to stress and tensions which are psychological, emotional and spiritual in nature. Overconfidence can lead to arrogance and narrow-mindedness. Underconfidence can lead to depression and loss of self-esteem. However, there is a process of unmasking oneself of all these different identities and becoming natural.

When you are natural, you flow with the circumstances of life and there is greater adaptability, adjustment and acceptance. These are the qualities that we lack as human beings. Yoga helps us to find that naturalness within and to become aware of the different identities that we adopt in the course of our lives, knowing what is appropriate and inappropriate for us.

When adults try to change their identities and become natural, it is difficult because of their conditioning. When we confront these conditionings, they create more stress and anxiety. Nevertheless we seem to manage. It is a slow and gradual process in which we try and fail, try and fail, try and fail. Those who continue eventually succeed. Like the story of the hare and the tortoise, slow and steady wins the race.

### **Natural education**

However, there is another option available, which is educating our children to be natural. With this understanding, in 1995 we established a children's yoga association in Munger, named Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal, the Children's Yoga Fellowship. It is dedicated to developing the total personality of children between the ages of seven and fourteen. BYMM began with only five children, who are now aged twelve to fifteen and administer their own organization without adult supervision or intervention. The children have been trained as yoga propagators, instructors and demonstrators.

From 1995 to 1999, these children have imparted yoga training in 225 schools in India with the permission of the principals and the education authorities. In five years, they have coordinated yoga training for nearly 40,000 children, and educated other children as yoga teachers and yoga demonstrators. At the end of 1999, the Children's Yoga Fellowship has 225 yoga propagators, 350 yoga instructors and 1000 yoga demonstrators. Every year they conduct a one-week yoga training program in Munger, where thousands of children come together to practise yoga without their parents. This festival is so full of life and joy that it definitely inspires us to become like a child once again.

# Sannyasa Festival

The Role of Sannyasa in the Third Millennium,  
Satyanandashram, Paiania, Greece  
March 29–31, 2000







# Sannyasa and the Beauty of Life

If there has ever been an understanding of transcendental purity, integrated honesty and simplicity, these qualities are reflected in the personality of Swami Sivananda. The teaching he imparted to his disciples was that you do not have to search for the light outside. The light will shine forth from within once you are able to purify yourself. Those who adhered to this wisdom of Swami Sivananda did not make any attempt to become luminous, but today the light is shining from their hearts. This was always the vision of ancient India.

## **Inner light**

There is a saying from ancient India, *Atma deepo bhava*, which means, “Become self-effulgent.” The process of becoming self-effulgent has been the sadhana of thinkers in the past. However, in order to become self-effulgent there has to be an adjustment and modification in your life. If you work in a coal mine wearing white clothes, it will be very difficult to keep them clean because ultimately their whiteness will be affected by the blackness of the coal. That has happened to every individual who has come to live and work in this worldly dimension. The purity and self-effulgence have been diminished by the influence of the world of the senses and sensuality.

It is appropriate to discuss the process of attaining inner purity here in Greece, because the Greek civilization has

given the world great thinkers and philosophers, who have helped to shape the mentality of people and make them aware of other dimensions of life. Although India and Greece are geographically and culturally poles apart, integration of the two cultures did take place in the form of a philosophical understanding and an exchange of knowledge. Before Alexander the Great set out for India, he met his spiritual master and asked what he could bring back. His master told him to bring a wise man from India. The substantial cross-cultural exchange that took place between ancient Greece and ancient India was one of knowledge. Therefore, it is appropriate that in reviving that ancient connection today, we are celebrating the concept of sannyasa.

As people become more aware of the need to find harmony and integration in their lives, they try to become pure in thought, word and deed. That is the purpose of the sannyasa system. The sannyasa festival that we are celebrating represents an attempt to understand this concept of developing the pure inner nature, which is full of wisdom, understanding, compassion and love.

### **Preservation of wisdom**

What is sannyasa? This is the first question we need to address. Is it asceticism? Is it renouncing the world and becoming a monk? Is it following a specific belief system, or is it part of a religion? It is none of these. Rather, it is a tradition which has been concerned with maintaining knowledge and wisdom for the development of the individual as a single unit, of society as a communal unit, and of understanding the deeper relationship that links the individual with the universal reality. People belonging to the sannyasa tradition have maintained the wisdom of the past for use in the present environment. They have written on all dimensions of social and spiritual life, and are known as *rishis* or seers. A seer is able to see the needs of society and also perceive the knowledge that should be utilized for its development.

A sannyasin named Vatsyayana wrote the *Kama Sutras*, which many of you may have read. A sannyasin named Sage

Kanad wrote the first treatise on atomic theory and principles. A sannyasin named Kautilya wrote the *Artha Shastra*, the first book describing a system of economic balance that can exist between different societies and nations. Sannyasins gave us the philosophies of Tantra, Vedanta and Samkhya to understand the human personality. A sannyasin named Charaka wrote the *Charaka Samhita*, a treatise on health and medicine, and another sannyasin wrote a book describing the manufacture and use of various armaments to defend against aggression. This indicates that sannyasins took into consideration all the dimensions of individual and social life, and took steps to preserve and maintain the sanctity and purity of human life in both spiritual and material terms.

Sannyasins are concerned with the preservation of *vidya*, knowledge. It is clear that sannyasa is not a philosophical sect or ascetic cult, nor a process of renouncing the world, but the expression of an understanding of the sustenance and development of human society. Today people think the role of sannyasa is limited to spiritual pursuits and philosophical interpretations of life, but that is only one aspect of the sannyasa tradition. Even today we find that sannyasins who are true to their tradition remain aloof from religious and conditioned beliefs.

### **Meaning of sannyasa**

The truth of sannyasa is lost on many people because they are not able to understand it. They see it as a means of becoming recognized in society as a master, guru or preacher. Sannyasa does not advocate renunciation; rather it advocates letting go of things that are unnecessary in your life. What is renunciation? Is it leaving the family? Is it leaving society? Is it leaving the pleasures and comforts of life, or is it something else? Renunciation is not a vow of poverty or rejection of the social environment. It is easy to renounce family, society and friends, comforts and luxuries, but it is very difficult to renounce the agitations, desires and ambitions of human nature. If at all there is perfect renunciation, it is of desires, ambitions, and idolization of people. Sannyasa is different

from the relationship that exists between guru and disciple. A disciple puts the master on a high pedestal and idealizes him, but sannyasa does not permit this at all. Do not confuse the concept of the guru-disciple relationship with the ideal of sannyasa, because they are two different paths.

Sannyasa is a tradition. The word sannyasa consists of two parts: *sam*, meaning 'total', and *nyasa*, meaning 'to put in trust'. When you have money that you wish to use for a charitable purpose, you put it in a trust. The rules of the trust are that the money can only be used for the benefit of others, not for personal use or pleasure. The same applies to sannyasa. We place in trust our abilities, strengths and all our qualities to help other people. This is the wealth that we all have, and in sannyasa this wealth is placed in trust for the universal consciousness. Sannyasa begins when we start to consider that nothing is ours. Instead we feel that everything is meant to enrich life, because we have sensitivity for the auspicious and beautiful things of life. Think about it thoroughly, and understand first whether or not this applies to you.

The second point we should be aware of is that sannyasa is not just a concept, but also a tradition that involves modification and moderation so as to give us a deeper identification with ourselves. It is definitely not an easy process, otherwise everybody in the world would be able to follow it. In this process we become aware of the faith and trust that exists towards a mission and a vision rather than towards a person. The person becomes a medium to express the aims of the mission and the vision. This is the real concept of sannyasa.

### **Integrating personal and cosmic laws**

The earliest reference we have to sannyasins goes back about ten thousand years. In the time of the empire created by Sri Rama, sannyasins were the guides, gurus and moral authorities of the empire. However, they did not live in the luxury of the court, but led very simple and pure lives. They had their own lifestyle, which was different from the life of

the court. They lived in an ashram, known as a *gurukul*, the family of the guru, where adults and children of the society were educated in the skills of both material and spiritual life. They were the first people to experiment, not only with academic education, but also with vocational education, to combine academic understanding and vocational skills. In today's language those gurukuls would have been schools, colleges and universities.

Sannyasins also followed a tradition that helped people to be in tune with the natural and cosmic forces. They were the lawmakers who cared for nature, society, social justice, law and order. Much of their literature and many of their scriptures are used today to help us understand the conditions of past civilizations. In order to care for their immediate environment and the preservation of nature, they utilized yajnas or havans to help enrich the environment. They understood that the environment was not made up only of elements such as space, air, fire, water and earth, but also that the underlying principle in all the elements was energy. When that energy is nourished and sustained, it nourishes and sustains human life.

Sannyasins also discovered that a person is not just an expression of the senses, but also of spirit. The predominant component of sannyasa is its reflective nature. Through reflection, we are able to understand the spiritual link that exists between ourselves and all other forms of creation. In sannyasa, there is also an external discipline, which leads to an understanding of inner discipline, an external awareness that leads to the realization of inner awareness. The external discipline is known as *sadhana*, the personal effort to create an environment conducive to change. Many have been successful in realizing the unity of nature, personality and universal consciousness through sadhana, by creating an atmosphere of transformation.

### **Seeing the whole**

Sannyasins never believed in one particular form of God; rather they believed in the imperishable reality which does not change. They recognized that life is perishable,

changeable, transformable, but that beyond this there is an imperishable and unchanging dimension of experience. The name they used for this imperishable dimension was Om or *pranava*. Om became the symbol of the sannyasa tradition. Even today the master instructs the sannyasins to focus only on Om, and not on any particular image, form or expression developed by society. Om is the representation of the omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent universal consciousness. If there is any belief that a sannyasin adheres to, it is belief in the imperishable reality expressed in the form of Om.

It was only after cultures became isolated from each other that people started to think of sannyasa as being part of eastern mysticism. As cultures drifted apart, they created their own systems of belief and understanding. Isolated from each other, each held on to their own concepts, to one particular idea, believing that to be final. So today each culture or belief is blind to the others, unable to see the whole picture.

There is the story of four blind men who go to see an elephant. One holds the tail and says that the elephant is like a rope. Another holds the leg and says that the elephant is like a pillar. The third holds the trunk and says that the elephant is like a python. Each one gives a different interpretation, but none of the interpretations reflects the true elephant. This is the way our civilizations and cultures behave today. Sometimes there is great conflict and confusion because we are not able to understand what is real and what is not real. We are caught up in our own head-trips, unable to come out from them and develop a harmonious perception. Therefore, modern masters who saw the state of society said that sannyasa should again be brought to light as a tool for greater appreciation of the truth in life.

### **The truth of sannyasa**

Many masters and their groups have given their own interpretation of sannyasa, but it was the vision of Swami Sivananda that maintained the purity of the sannyasa tradition. Not all those who belonged to the Sivananda

tradition understood the concept of sannyasa, but there were a few who were able to imbibe the real nature of sannyasa. Swami Sivananda was the first master in this present age to start initiating foreigners and women as spiritual aspirants on the path of sannyasa. He was criticized for this by the authorities of the tradition, but nevertheless he continued because he realized that sannyasa allows one to come into contact with the inner nature.

This understanding of sannyasa was developed further by his disciple, Swami Satyananda. He was also criticized, but he was not concerned about criticism because he knew that spiritual realization is the birthright of every individual. A new understanding of sannyasa developed and, as a result, certain classifications were made within the tradition. To live complete sannyasa is very difficult, and it is not possible or practical for the majority of people. It is like truth; it is not always possible to speak the truth.

Somebody once asked Mullah Nasruddin if he had ever spoken the truth in his life. He answered, "I have never spoken the truth, nor will I attempt to speak it, nor will I ever speak it." This does not mean that he was a liar, but that it is very difficult to speak the truth in any situation, because we are unable to be truthful with ourselves. Telling the bare facts is not the truth. Truth is not something that you can speak through your mouth and with your tongue; rather it is something you experience in the depth of your heart. Similarly, sannyasa is also a difficult process because it is not something to be lived with rigid external discipline. It is not asceticism, not renunciation, not rejection of the environment. It is something that has to be experienced internally. With this understanding, we can then experience and express inner balance and beauty in our lives.



# Satsang 1

## **How can a sannyasin deal with everyday life, family life and work? What attitude should one have?**

There are two aspects to sannyasa life. The first is non-participation in social life and the second is participation in social life. When you have grown wings and you are flying, it is irrelevant to ask how to come back down to earth and not fly. If you have taken poorna sannyasa, you should not ask how to deal with family and social responsibilities, because that concept does not exist in sannyasa. If you have such questions in mind, then do not take poorna sannyasa in the first place. Today, this has become a very important question in people's minds, which means there is confusion in understanding the concept of sannyasa.

Traditional poorna sannyasa is a life in which you live alone without any obligations or duties to your near and dear ones. You identify with all people as one global family. Even if you have a family and you are a poorna sannyasin, you have to have the same feeling for your family members as you have for total strangers. This relationship is not based on attachment, but on compassion and love for all. Neither Swami Sivananda nor Swami Satyananda had wives or children. It was their voluntary desire to be alone. When this voluntary desire to be alone is positive, constructive and creative, then you feel the same sentiments for every being on the planet.

However, as this path is only possible for a few, another system arose. The development of a sannyasa identity while

living in the material world is the tradition or system of karma sannyasa, placing in trust the actions that you perform. While you continue to live in the world with your commitments and obligations, families and responsibilities, you develop a form of sannyasa that relates not to your ultimate aspiration, but to your actions in life. Your actions are not the ultimate aspiration. We all have the same aspiration to experience our real nature and realize the connection between individuality and universality. But we also have to understand that we all have different needs. Some people are happy leading a single life because they have no need for the support, security and affection generated by leading a family life. Others are conditioned to seek security, support and recognition from their family. This is part of a social mentality, but even with this state of being and mind it is still possible to live a sannyasa life, being aware of your spiritual identity while living in the material world.

Karma sannyasa is a state of sannyasa in which leading a normal social, family life with all the professional obligations is permitted. At the same time, an effort is made to be in harmony with one's inner spiritual aspirations. In the process of karma sannyasa, you continue your responsibilities and duties while maintaining your sadhana and developing an independent identity. This independent identity leads to the development of awareness in relation to your desires and actions. Sadhana helps in understanding desires and directing actions in a more creative, constructive and positive way, so the mind becomes free from the source of deep attachments and obsessions. The difference between social life and sannyasa life is that in social life we crave recognition, security, friendship and love. This craving becomes an obsession which influences our personality, alters our behaviour and makes the mind identify with objects or situations that can help fulfil these desires and ambitions. When the mind becomes obsessive, it creates a conditioning which is very difficult to overcome. So there is no loss in terms of social understanding, but a gain in terms of freedom from attachments and obsessions.

Whether you are a karma sannyasin or a poorna sannyasin, it is only a matter of adjustment. If there are no immediate desires to bind your mind to the fulfilment of an ambition, then your creativity will be free to express itself in another form. You do not have to worry about shelter because you have the confidence that you can survive not only in a house, but also under a tree. You do not have to worry about food because you know that even if you do not get butter with your bread, you can live by eating the simplest things without craving for something better. In poorna sannyasa, the mind is not bound by expectations and desires or by ideas of success and failure. Rather, one is allowed the freedom to move like the wind in the world, sometimes with great force and sometimes with passivity. If there are other poorna sannyasins around, then the emanations of energy from them become a greater force that nourishes, supports and uplifts people who come in contact with that energy.

To develop the identity of a sannyasin while living in the world with responsibilities, obligations and duties, Swami Satyananda revived the tradition of karma sannyasa. It is not a new tradition, but an ancient one. In karma sannyasa, who cares whether or not you have expectations or responsibilities? You only have to follow your calling in life while maintaining a spiritual awareness, an inner spiritual identity. You are free to live your life as you wish. There is no avoidance or denial of your responsibilities or actions; rather you are able to perform them with greater clarity. The only expectation is that while living that life, you try to develop awareness of your inner spiritual self and be in harmony with it.

The principles of karma sannyasa say that for twenty-three hours a day you will be your social self, but for one hour you will be your inner sannyasin self. While developing the identity of a karma sannyasin, you learn to be truthful to yourself and to develop faith and trust in yourself. You learn to be sincere and humble within yourself and to observe the play of desire, ambition and ego in your life. This teaches you how to attain balance, inner peace, joy and happiness in the expressions of life. Swami Sivananda used to say, “One ounce

of practice is better than tons of theory.” Similarly, one hour of karma sannyasa life every day balances twenty-three hours of normal material life. This is possibly one of the greatest achievements of karma sannyasa. Once the seed sprouts and grows, you can be assured that one day it will turn into a giant tree where you and everyone else can enjoy the fruits and find shade and coolness.

**How can we distinguish if what we feel for the guru is emotional feeling or devotional emotion?**

It depends what you feel for the guru. If you feel protective towards the guru, if you feel love and affection, if you feel angry with the guru, it is a feeling, because devotion has no colour. Devotion creates a link that is internal and spiritual, which cannot be defined through logic. Mothers have a very special connection with their children; it seems that somewhere their souls are one. Even if the child is many miles away and something happens, intuitively the mother knows something has happened. Now, did the mother know just because of an emotion? Scientific research has proved that such an inner link exists. The problem comes when we try to understand this inner link through intellect and logic. But it is not a linear connection; it is much deeper and goes beyond intellect and logic.

The link that one should try to develop with the guru is an inner emotional link, which is not linear or sequential, but spiritual. This can only happen when you have trust in the guru and in yourself. If the rock that is picked up by a sculptor cries out, “Do not use your hammer and chisel on me,” then that rock will not attain the shape envisioned by the sculptor. In the relationship between guru and disciple, the necessary emotion that exists between them is acceptance of the guru’s will in the disciple’s life. That is the true emotion, which leads to the experience of inner union with the guru.

Although we talk about it, somehow we do not accept the guru and disciple relationship fully. There is hypocrisy in our behaviour. The disciple says to the guru, “I have made you my guru and I love you,” but under his breath he says,

“Live up to the expectations of my love or I may reject you,” and in the next breath he says, “Live up to my expectations because if not I will feel hurt.” In this way, the disciple tries to become the guru of the guru and does not allow the guru to express his real nature. The disciple expects the guru to always have a very kind and compassionate face and to never frown.

Have you read the story of Milarepa’s life? If Milarepa’s guru had come to the West, he would probably have been killed for being so strong, rough, rude and inconsiderate. That was one reason why gurus seldom came to the West. One came and he was crucified. Another came and he was condemned, incarcerated and finally poisoned. Today you say Socrates was a spiritual teacher, but what happened then? Today so many follow the path that Jesus showed us, but what happened when he was alive?

Ordinary human beings are unclear about passing feelings and true emotions. The relationship between guru and disciple must give us the wisdom to know the difference between the two. Feelings are coloured by our expectations, our concepts of morality and justice. Unconditioned emotion without any trappings leads to the experience of the pure and transcendental connection that exists between individuals, between disciple and master, between the individual and God. Therefore, try to find the real emotion, not the coloured and conditioned feelings, to guide your understanding, actions and behaviour.

**If we accept that poorna sannyasa is a karmic fact, how do you explain that many people who have it in their karma react negatively to the idea? Can the guru change the facts in such karma?**

Karma always means bondage, the restrictive limiting dimension of personality. It also means that even the beauty we experience in life is conditioned and limited. Poorna sannyasa is an attempt to outgrow or overcome these restrictions and limitations, and to become free from bondage. Sometimes the spirit is willing, but the mind is

weak. The inspiration and motivation are there, but the mind questions it, and when confusion is strong, the inspiration and motivation become clouded. In such situations, if there is no acceptance of the guru's will, then there is the possibility of falling back into the old trappings of life.

In order to overcome the karmas, there has to be total understanding and acceptance of the will that inspires and motivates us. It should be clear that the guru cannot cut the karmas for us, but can show us the path by which we can liberate ourselves from the bondage of karma. There are some extraordinary disciples who find extraordinary gurus, and because of their compatibility, the guru is able to cut through the karmas of the disciple easily, but such situations are rare. The rest have to continually hold in their hearts the inspiration that brought them to this path.

If we are able to maintain our inspiration, then nothing is difficult. It is a challenge even for sannyasins, because we are conditioned to identify with our traits of mind and body. How far is it possible to transform them? It is very, very hard. So the best way is to keep your inspiration alive, and surrender yourself, not to your expectations and ego, but to the will that moves freely in the lives of everyone. Only then can we become free from our karmas. It happens when, in simplicity and innocence, grace smiles upon us. The Bible says that in order to enter the kingdom of heaven, be innocent like a child, be humble and pure. But can we apply that principle in our lives? That is the question you have to answer for yourself.

# The Ideal of Sannyasa

Let us look at the inspiration of sannyasa through the example of the sannyasa ideal we can perceive in the life of our guru, Swami Satyananda. When he was given sannyasa initiation by Swami Sivananda, he wrote a poem, as is the habit of every disciple, because the poetic expression of an inner feeling is the most appropriate one. That poetic expression takes a different dimension when it comes from the depths of the heart of an enlightened being, and whenever we read it, it gives us great inspiration, faith, courage and strength. The poem is called ‘Sankalpa’, meaning resolution. The first part is known as ‘The Source’.

*I am an invisible child of a thousand faces of love  
That floats over the swirling sea of life,*

The invisible child he speaks of is the spirit, and the thousand faces of love are the various expressions of the spirit in both the manifest and unmanifest dimensions, expressing only love.

*Surrounded by the meadows of the winged shepherds,  
Where stillness of divine love and beauty  
Reign in the spring and bloom in the midnight  
And the summer's warmth is felt as softness.  
Often I pass to the place  
Where there is no separation of the sun and moon,*

*But where eternal light spreads a carpet  
Of sparkling reflections of itself within the heart and eyes of all,  
Even those who are blind to see.*

*And where teardrops water flowers of happiness  
And pass into brooklets of experience and then to the open sea.*

*Life often cuts at my body and mind  
And though blood may be seen passing and a cry might be heard,  
Do not be deceived that sorrow could dwell within my being,  
or suffering within my soul.*

*There shall never be a storm that can wash the path from  
under my feet.*

*There shall never be a storm that can wash the direction  
from my heart*

*Or the light from my eyes, or the purpose from this life.*

*I know that I am untouchable to the forces as long as I have a  
direction,*

*An aim, a goal: to serve, to love and to give.*

*Strength lies in the magnification of the secret qualities  
of my own personality, my own character.*

*And though I am only a messenger,  
I am me.*

The second part is on 'Aspirations'.

*Let me decorate many hearts and paint a thousand faces  
With colours of inspiration and soft, silent sounds of value.  
Let me be like a child running barefoot  
Through the forest of laughing and crying people,  
Giving flowers of imagination and wonder, that God gives free.  
Shall I fall on bended knees and wait for someone to bless me  
With happiness and a life of golden dreams?*

*No, I shall run into the desert of life with my arms open,  
Sometimes falling, sometimes stumbling,  
But always picking myself up, a thousand times if necessary.  
Often life will burn me;  
Often life will cherish me tenderly*



*And many of my days will be haunted with complications and obstacles,*

*And there will be moments so beautiful that my soul will weep in ecstasy.*

*I shall be a witness, but never shall I run or turn away from life, from me.*

*Never shall I forsake myself*

*Or the timeless lessons I have taught myself,*

*Nor shall I let the value of divine inspiration and being be lost.*

*My rainbow-coloured bubble will carry me*

*Further than beyond the horizon's settings,*

*Forever to serve, to love, and to live as a sannyasin.*

### **Serve, love and purify**

This was the sankalpa as it manifested spontaneously in the life of our guru, Swami Satyananda. The hallmark of sannyasa has been to serve, love and purify. Therefore, the sannyasa tradition does not say that one should isolate oneself, but rather that one has to become an integrated part of the world. This is where sannyasa differs from other concepts or traditions of asceticism or renunciation. The same inspiration propelled Buddha out into the open to serve the public after he had achieved enlightenment. The same inspiration prompted Mahavir to come out and serve humanity after the attainment of nirvana, and it forced Jesus to come out and serve suffering humanity after having attained Christ consciousness.

Through their examples we can see that isolation from the world, getting involved and lost in one's own realization has never been the aim of spiritual traditions which advocate service. This is the opposite of how we usually understand the process of realization. Where there is rejection, there is suppression of the natural expressions, experiences and beauty of life. In sannyasa, there is no rejection, no suppression; rather there is an understanding that everything can become a tool for discovering the source of contentment and truth within. However, so that we can

express this as a direction in our life, not as indulgence, we have to undergo training. The untrained mind has to be trained.

There is a gospel song:

*Put your hand in the hand of the man who walks on water,  
Put your hand in the hand of the man who calms the sea.  
Take a look at yourself and you can look at others differently.  
Put your hand in the hand of the man from Galilee.*

Water symbolizes the unconscious. We do not walk through life, we sink, because we subject ourselves to the influence of situations, problems and difficulties and we are unable to confront them. When we restrict ourselves to such limited experiences, how can we float? We sink because these limited experiences are like rocks that pull us down into the depths. This is why people have always sought freedom from pain and suffering. Pain and suffering sink us and we cannot experience the joys of life. But through the training, education, knowledge and wisdom that we give ourselves, we learn not to sink, but to walk on the water.

The second line of the song means that when we are able to know the causes of pain and suffering, then all our passions, all our destructive and dissipated mental forces, our *vrittis*, become still. *Yogaschitta vritti nirodhah* – cessation of the *vrittis* or patterns of the mind is yoga. When the *vrittis* are stilled, there are no obsessive or passionate expressions; only the expression of wisdom remains.

The third line reminds us of: *Tada drashtuh swaroope' vasthanam* – then you become established in your real nature. When we are able to look at ourselves as we are, without the conditioning of the *vrittis* or covering of any mask, then we begin to see others also as they are without any trappings or masks. This training is known as *sadhana*. Through *sadhana*, we can still the agitation of the mind and harmonize the expressions of life.

Remember that yoga does not say that you have to become a light unto yourself immediately. First you can become a mirror that reflects the light. Those who become a light are

the gurus and those who become the mirrors are the swamis. The word *swami* means ‘one who is master of oneself’. It is not a degree or a piece of paper identifying you as a swami. It is the culmination of a process of effort which allows you to become pure and free, to live the ideal of sannyasa: service, love and purity.

# Tradition in Modern Sannyasa

We have discussed the history and ideals of sannyasa and the inspiration that keeps it alive. The greatest task in sannyasa is *vairagya*, overcoming attachment. In the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Krishna tells Arjuna that it is the mind's association with different objects that creates attachment. Attachment creates desire and when desire is not fulfilled, it creates anger and aggression. This aggression and anger give birth to intellectual confusion, and when the intellect is confused, knowledge of right and wrong is lost. Finally, when understanding of right and wrong is lost, the inner personality is totally dissipated and disturbed, and this imbalance in the inner personality leads to death in life.

We are familiar with this sequence from attachment to loss of clarity, to inner disturbances, and the death of human wisdom and creativity. It is a very revealing sequence: association with a sense object gives birth to a desire, but fulfilment of that desire creates another attraction and association with another object, and that leads to more desires. In yoga, this concept is known as *raga*, attraction or attachment. Unfulfilled desire leads to aversion, aggression and anger, *dvesha*.

Obsession, either in the form of attraction or repulsion, clouds the mind, and then the experiences we have gained during our life of knowing good from bad, right from wrong, just from unjust, also become clouded. If a mirror is covered with a layer of dust, no matter how hard we look,

we will be unable to see our true reflection. The dust on the mirror represents cloudiness of thought and knowledge. Thus the story continues until there is absolute death of human creativity, vitality and dynamism. This statement of Sri Krishna's, about five thousand years ago, laid the foundation stone for the development and understanding of human psychology according to the principles of sannyasa and yoga.

### **Breadth of spirit**

Our involvement in the world of the senses and the manifest dimension is only a partial involvement of our spirit in relation to creation. Let us understand this in a different way. You are a person, I am a person. Do we only look at things from an intellectual level, or is there scope for understanding the feelings? Is there scope for other aspects of our nature to become active participants in the journey of our life? If we say that we can participate actively in this world only through the intellect, it is a wrong understanding of our nature. In expressing the qualities of life we use all the faculties of intellect, emotions, senses, attitudes, perceptions, understanding, and so on. Similarly, the involvement of the spirit in this manifest dimension is not only sensorial, not only rational, but also covers the unmanifest dimensions that exist deep within us.

The other dimensions where spirit expresses itself can be realized only when we have been able to divert our attention from the sensorial experiences and become aware of the other non-sensorial areas. In order to divert our perception and attention, we have to follow a process of moving the awareness from one point to another. This displacement of awareness from one object to another and then another represents the process of vairagya.

When we go to a park to admire the flowers and the beauty, we do not keep looking at just one flower or one beautiful object all the time. There may definitely be a craving or appreciation of it, but once we shift our attention to another object, the influence of the previous one is not as powerful.

For example, we look at an attractive, vibrant flower and like it. Then we look at another flower, which is also beautiful and colourful. The attention has now shifted from the first flower to the second. Vairagya has taken place in regard to the first flower and raga, attraction, has taken place in relation to the second flower. When we look at a third flower, vairagya will take place in regard to the second flower and raga will be associated with the third flower.

### **Overcoming obsession and attaining vairagya**

It is the ego that creates this strong possessive desire, leading to an obsessive personality. It happens in such a subtle way that we are not even aware it is happening, but the current is so strong that we are sucked in and cannot free ourselves from it. The mind is attracted to the material, sensorial, sensual world; it is always going towards it. So what do we do? In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Krishna tells Arjuna the method for overcoming this deep and obsessive attraction or desire. The method he describes is vairagya, transfer of awareness or perception from the material dimension to something else. The idea is very simple and the practice is also very simple, but our ego association causes fear and insecurity, and asks, “Why do I have to leave this? Why do I have to leave that? What will my condition be if I leave something behind?” In fact, the concept of renunciation has always been associated with leaving things behind, whereas the concept of sannyasa is associated with displacement of awareness from one object of attraction to another. What do we do? We shift our awareness to the dimension of spiritual experience.

The *Yoga Sutras* of Sage Patanjali state very clearly that when the mind becomes free from the craving for objects and develops the attitude of a seer or witness, vairagya has been attained. This is twofold: mundane and transcendental. On the mundane level, vairagya takes place in relation to the attraction of the senses and mind, so much so that you do not even desire things that you see, hear, taste, feel or smell. On the transcendental dimension, it takes place when we become aware of the desire to be enlightened.

When we meditate, there are times when we have fantastic visions or experiences and we wish to repeat this experience in subsequent practice. Sometimes we have visions of gods, guru or angels appearing and we love that experience immensely. We feel that such visions indicate that we are progressing very fast, evolving and becoming spiritual. Then after some time we find that no visions are coming and we start to think, “Is what I am attempting right or wrong? Is it appropriate? Should I do it?” If we see a demon with two horns growing from his head, we start thinking, “Have I regressed in my spiritual journey?” Even in meditation we have expectations. Even in meditation there is a rejection of a particular area of experience.

If we reject certain experiences and look forward to better ones, meditation is not going to take us very far, because on the one hand we are attached to something beautiful which is a creation of our own mind, and on the other hand we reject and avoid an impression or experience which is also a creation of our mind. So here meditation has not failed us, we have failed ourselves. We must keep on trying and take it as guru’s grace, and maybe one day we will succeed.

Attachment and attraction, raga, and rejection, dwesha, are natural features of the human personality. Vairagya leads to an understanding and awareness of the inner process that makes us realize the beauty of life and reject the ugly. While yoga says, “Become aware of what is happening,” sannyasa says, “Live what is happening.” While yoga says, “Observe your responses, interactions and behaviour in relation to a situation,” sannyasa says, “Live that experience with greater understanding of your true self.” Vairagya leads to the development of faith, willpower and trust in one’s self. Faith is awakened when vairagya is attained, trust is developed when vairagya dawns, and willpower is born with the coming of vairagya.

### **Self-understanding – yama and niyama**

In order to attain vairagya there has to be a greater understanding of one’s mental nature. Where yoga speaks of

five yamas and five niyamas, in sannyasa we have twenty-five yamas and twenty-five niyamas. However, we will deal only with the important ones that can help remove the clouded nature of our perceptions and personality. Experiencing truth is *satya*. The first point is to become aware of the truthful aspect of the human personality, not the false, hypocritical, untruthful nature. That is a very difficult sadhana. It is easy to practise meditation, kriya yoga and kundalini yoga, but it is not easy to practise observing the truth. Let us simply ask ourselves one question, “Am I truthful or not?” Be sincere with your answer. Do not be a hypocrite. Being truthful is very hard. In order to hide the falseness that exists in our lives we adopt different identities and personalities. But once the quality of truth is awakened within us, very little remains to be attained.

Total absence of violence and aggression in our personality, thinking, behaviour and action is the concept of *ahimsa*. It is next to impossible to perfect it, but provided we are sincere and committed to the process of transformation and can accept this change, it happens. When we want to create a beautiful picture, it begins with the first stroke of the brush. So do not worry about whether or not you will be able to create the picture. The conviction that we can place the first stroke on the canvas of our life is the conviction that initiates the process of sannyasa. In sannyasa life we undergo changes that allow us to develop better human qualities and transcend the limitations and restrictions we encounter in our day-to-day environment and in our responses to situations. The effort we make in sannyasa to transform ourselves indicates the process in which we begin to open ourselves up.

### **Let go of the moorings**

The tradition has said that in order to experience sannyasa fully, faith and willpower have to be generated. Willpower gives us the strength to accept change and transformation. Faith is a threefold experience: faith in oneself, faith in the master and faith in the divine will. Faith in oneself represents the component of trust, “Yes, I can achieve.” Faith in the



guru represents the component of knowledge, that you are being guided and that this guidance is going to open up new dimensions of creativity in your life. Faith in God indicates the ability to let go of our moorings and attachments and live in harmony with the divine will. Letting go of our attachments leads to the experience of sannyasa.

We say, “Yes, I want to progress on my spiritual path, but just let me hold on to this attraction or attachment.” But it is only when we let go of our desires, of our instincts, that we can evolve and progress. Learning how to let go and not hold onto anything for self-gratification and self-satisfaction is very relevant in the present day context. It is only when we are able to release the moorings that tie our personality down that we can really and truly understand what spiritual life is all about.

### **Developing intensity**

The trigger for living the experience of spiritual life can be anything. It can be an inspiration, an act of sadhana, a selfless action or an intellectual undersatnding. We know the story of Archimedes. He was given a problem to solve and found the solution while taking a bath. He jumped out of the bath shouting, “Eureka!” and ran naked to inform the court. That motivation or understanding was so powerful that he forgot all about himself, the state of his body or where he was. Any event or action, anything can become a trigger for realization of that spiritual power, that spiritual dimension, provided there is intensity. It is this inner intensity which we try to develop and which can help us overcome many difficulties.

As sannyasins, we try to develop intensity of faith, action and knowledge, and this leads to the culmination of the journey that we have begun. So it is not a passive tradition, rather it is a very active and dynamic tradition. When we meditate, there has to be intensity in meditation. Even if we practise sadhana, there has to be intensity in that sadhana. Through intensity we can overcome our karmas and samskaras and become free. Sufis have expressed this intensity in devotion through dance and music and have attained great spiritual

heights. Yogis have expressed it through their sadhana and have attained great spiritual heights. Sannyasins have shown intensity on the path of sannyasa and have attained great heights. It is the coming together of all the human qualities along with effort that becomes the cause of intensity.

When we can develop intensity in love or compassion, we are there. When we can develop intensity in truthfulness, we are there. When we can develop intensity in ahimsa, we are there. Sannyasa believes that it is not enough to just think about a concept. We also have to awaken the force, strength and courage within that concept, to make it a stepping-stone for our higher attainments. Therefore, sannyasa is not only a concept. It represents a special individual character and expression. This special character and expression can be developed with the help of yoga practices.

## Satsang 2

**What is the advantage of being initiated into poorna sannyasa? Will it also be possible to realize the sannyasa qualities of ‘serve, love, give’, and ‘colour with joy’ as a karma sannyasin? I felt in my heart the call of poorna sannyasa the first time I met you, but I have social responsibilities with a family. So perhaps it is right to serve as a karma sannyasin?**

We have already differentiated between poorna sannyasa and karma sannyasa. You may want poorna sannyasa, but feel that karma sannyasa is more applicable to you. It is your thought, perception or desire. But instead of just following the sway of your emotions, try to look at yourself in practical terms. The aim will always be there; it will not disappear if you do not take poorna sannyasa now.

You have to remember that sannyasa is a process of education. Education always begins with primary class, not with university. If you do not have a basic understanding of the primary and secondary levels, there is no use going on to university level. So I would not suggest poorna sannyasa or even karma sannyasa, but jignasu sannyasa. Let the seed grow naturally in your life and do not try to hasten the sprouting of the seed because that will not be a natural process. In fact, sannyasa is against such rushing through life. What is there to desire? The path is before you, the aim is before you, and you have to begin the journey with the first step. So there is really no use even asking this question.

Start the process of self-education. Learn the alphabet. Learn the consonants and vowels before you attempt to read a very technical book. Even if you buy the technical book without knowing the alphabet, you will only have the satisfaction of knowing, “I have the book”, but you will not derive any wisdom from it. So do not follow the call of your desires, but follow the call of your true aspiration. If your aspiration is to experience the ideals of sannyasa, then start with the basic education, which begins with jignasu sannyasa.

**I know that for you, as spirit, time and space do not exist, but still how do you manage to follow the state of being, the purification and evolutionary process of your many thousands of disciples all over the world?**

The beauty of the tradition is that we do not try to follow the evolution of other people. A gardener plants many seeds in the garden and creates the right environment for the seeds to sprout. How many sprout and how many die is not the gardener’s responsibility, but depends on the quality of the seeds. If the environment is right and the guru attempts to provide such an atmosphere, then some seeds sprout and attain maturity, while others shrivel up and die. In spiritual life, nobody is responsible for another person. Being responsible for another person is not the ideal attitude. Rather, inspiring others to live their lives happily and joyously is the ideal followed by spiritual people.

Your involvement and your understanding of yourself allow you to grow or to shrivel up. This is something we need to understand deeply, because if gurus had to consider the life of every individual, they would go mad. You have to be responsible for your own direction in life. Somebody else can only point the way, but the effort to go that way is yours. On your journey, if you stop at McDonalds, it is your choice. The guide did his duty by pointing you in the right direction, but he does not hold you by the hand and take you to the end of the path. That would be a very long and tedious journey for the guide also. This is where trust, faith

and the ability to surrender oneself to the divine will play a major role.

**Paramahamsaji used to say that his job as guru was to take us to the guru within. Over the years I have begun to slowly trust my inner self, but I still need guidance and support. As a karma sannyasin how do I balance my devotion to guru, my commitment to his mission, and my need for guru's teaching and guidance with discovering and trusting my inner guru?**

It is true that every guru attempts to help the disciple to find the source of wisdom inside, which is recognized as the inner guru. As you involve yourself more in understanding the process of sadhana and learn to observe your responses and reactions to the environment and situations, you will be able to adjust and adapt. It has been stated in the *Ramayana* that faith and belief are the two eyes of a spiritual being. Faith and belief should not be blind. If faith and belief become blind, then despite having two eyes we remain blind. Faith and belief become our strength when finding a balance between the urge to experience external social life and the urge to experience the source of wisdom within. In this context, we have faith in the practice or the path, and we have belief in the conviction and understanding which we all carry within.

**Please tell us how a person should live in the ashram? What actually is ashram life?**

The traditional concept of ashram is a place where you can go to work on yourself. When Swami Satyananda went to his master, Swami Sivananda, and said, "I want to take sannyasa. I want to be initiated by you. What do I do?" Swami Sivananda replied, "Work in the ashram." Paramahamsaji asked him, "What kind of work?" Swami Sivananda said, "Everything that is required, whether it is in the kitchen, garden, administration, or writing and publishing books, just involve yourself in that. When you have purified yourself, then I will give you initiation." Paramahamsaji said, "I can do the same work at home, in the garden, in the kitchen, writing

and publishing books. Why do I need to be in the ashram for that? When I have completed my work at home, I will come back and you can initiate me.”

Swami Sivananda explained, “No, you need to work in the ashram, not at home, because when you work at home, it is for self-gratification, personal satisfaction and social and financial security. In this way you will develop more bondage, more links which will not allow you to become free later on. At home one responsibility will follow another, and you will be so caught up in your own creations that you will be unable to free yourself. But when you work in an ashram, for whom do you work? Not for yourself, but for a bigger cause. The satisfaction that you derive is not self-oriented; rather it is the satisfaction of having done the job properly for the benefit and wellbeing of many. The home environment will develop selfish attitudes and self-centred perceptions, while the ashram environment will develop selfless attitudes and universal perceptions. A selfless attitude is more relevant in spiritual life than the selfish attitudes which relate to social material life. The home is a place where you accumulate karmas and the ashram is a place where you exhaust your karmas.”

So, it is the attitude that we encounter in an ashram that is most important. An ashram is a place where we can learn to develop selfless attitudes and adjust with our own karmas, rather than accumulate more and more. Therefore, once in a while, to change our attitude and perception, it is important to come under the influence of the ashram environment. The ashram atmosphere helps us to develop immunity from samskaras and karmas. For getting to know our reactive personality and spiritual development for spiritual realization, the ashram is a better place than the home.

**What happens when the student does not really have feelings for the guru, when all he or she feels is deep respect? Is this how it should be or not?**

What kind of feeling are you referring to? Is there any greater feeling than respect? What kind of feeling do you hope to

associate with the guru? You can feel love, but love without respect has no meaning. You can feel affection, but affection without respect has no meaning. You can feel attraction, but attraction without respect has no meaning. The feeling of respect is better than any other feelings that you can enumerate.

**What are the signs that let us know we are ready to renounce the world and what are the signs that are just rejections of the world? Do we slip into renunciation naturally, is it a gradual karmic process, or do we take a conscious decision supported by willpower?**

You must have thought a great deal in order to write this question. However, the answer lies not in a philosophical interpretation or solutions, but in your own mind. Simplicity of thought and behaviour and serenity in life indicate the process of development. If you are open to attaining this, then you become a spiritual being. Simplicity and serenity are the qualities. Now ask yourself, “Am I simple, am I serene?” Try to find the answer to the question, “How can I attain simplicity and how can I attain serenity?”

**It is very difficult for me to renounce love in the relationship between man and woman. Why? Do people who renounce have to leave this desire also for a while? Why is the love between two people so strong?**

Love does not come into the relationship between a man and a woman. It is only a matter of sensual fulfilment. People say ‘grow’ in love, not ‘fall’ in love, ‘develop love and do not reject love’. But human beings do not know what love is. They think sensuality, sensorial and sensual fulfilment is love. They think that sexual contact is an expression of love. This is not true love; love is something different. When love grows inside, then the relationship deepens and unites two people ‘heart to heart’ and not ‘mind to mind’.

Love is a very pure word. Do not bring down the concept of love by associating it with the relationship between a man and a woman. Love leads to empathy, love leads to ecstasy. It

is a very sacred word. Just as the mantra Om is considered to be sacred, love is also considered to be sacred. So maybe it is time we learnt to change the definition of love in relation to our life. But one thing is definite – love is a connection of the heart, not the fulfilment of a desire. When hearts are connected, distance does not matter. Two beings may live physically apart, yet they always remain united in love.

**Could you tell us something more about developing the inner awareness or drashta in relation to our efforts to harmonize our inner and outer life, and develop a connection between the two? How can we synchronize the good qualities of heart and mind to work together?**

Once a man came to me in a very depressed mood. He said, “Swamiji, I have lost everything. My wife and children have left me, the bank has repossessed my home, cars and luxuries, I am bankrupt and I really do not know what to do. I think I may commit suicide.” He talked for about an hour and then got up and walked away. I was not able to advise him because every time I started, he would say, “But Swamiji you do not know the full extent of my problems. Listen to this.”

It was evening, so I followed him out of the gate, where some children were playing with their toys. A little girl was crying over a broken doll. As I watched, the man went up to the little girl and tried to comfort her, saying, ‘Don’t worry, you can always get another doll, a better one.’ Then I said to him, “You can also get another job and buy another car. You can remarry and raise another family. You are able to comfort another person, but not yourself. If you were able to comfort yourself, then you would not have to suffer. Have confidence in yourself. That is the key to success in life.” Three years after this incident the man came to the ashram, very happy, beaming, with his new wife and child. I said to him, “So you did not commit suicide after all?” He replied, “Suicide? Swamiji, I have never been so happy in my life!”

This story indicates the concept of drashta. We are able to see other people, but we are unable to see ourselves. When we are able to see ourselves, we become the seer, the *drashta*.



In order to witness yourself you have to rise above the waves that are created in the mind. Yoga has provided us with tools in the form of pratyahara and dharana to achieve this state of being. Just as we are able to objectively advise others how they should live their lives, we should be objective with ourselves. The aim of yoga is to make us aware of where we are in life and how we respond to different situations. When we are able to observe this, we become the seers of our own selves.

**Is it possible to meet our soul mate? How do you advise two people who love each other to live a harmonious life together?**

Many people say, “I am looking for my soul mate” or “I have found my soul mate.” But have you ever seen anybody who has lived their whole life with their soul mate? Associating your soul mate with your love and family life is inappropriate. It is difficult to find a ‘mind mate’, forget about a ‘soul mate’. It is difficult to find a person who is compatible with our thoughts, perceptions, desires, aspirations and mind. We do not know the nature of the mind, so how can we find a proper mind mate! If we do not even know the nature of the soul, how can we find a soul mate? Only a person who has experienced the soul can find a soul mate. Since no one falls into that category, perhaps our soul mate in this case should be only God.

Realization of the soul is a transcendental experience. If that transcendental nature is within me, and I have to link that experience with something, it also has to be transcendental. Water can merge with water without any difficulty. Oil, on the other hand, will not merge with water. Air can merge with air and fire can merge with fire without any difficulty. The soul can merge with God without any difficulty. The essence, the substance and the quality of the soul and God are one and the same. So the true soul mate of everyone is God or a person in whom the energy of God is manifested – the master.

**Please explain the meaning and purpose of dakshina at the time of initiation.**

Dakshina is the age-old concept of give and take. Traditionally, when disciples came to their guru, they would offer three things which symbolized ego, life and prosperity. The symbol for the ego was a coconut, which is very hard and difficult to crack, but once you crack the hard shell, the inside is delicious. Similarly, once we are able to crack the hard shell of our ego, the inside is pure. It symbolizes surrendering to the guru and allowing the guru's energy to manifest in the disciple's life. It symbolizes surrendering to the divine will, and not allowing the ego to become a barrier.

The second symbolic gift was the giving of water, which represents life. The third gift was money in the form of gold, so that the work or mission of the master could continue without falling into decline. The bestowing of wealth was symbolic of showing solidarity with the mission and vision of the guru and the guru's tradition.

Nowadays, these ideals still hold true. At the time of initiation you get something which is unique in your life, and how do you show your appreciation? By giving a leaf, by giving a flower? A flower does not support the mission or the vision of the tradition. A leaf does not support the vision or the mission of the guru's tradition. The gift that you offer should represent a will for continuity of the work. This is the concept of dakshina. When you receive something auspicious, beneficial and inspiring, then you contribute to the continuation of that mission.

# Sannyasa and Spiritual Vibrancy

We have been looking at the tradition of sannyasa, the inspiration of sannyasa and the process of sannyasa. Sannyasa is not only an understanding or a process of life. The aim of sannyasa is to develop and awaken the creative spiritual energy inside and to realize that spiritual energy as part of our natural material life. It is an aim that can be attained, but at the same time there has to be an understanding of the tradition from which sannyasa stems and the process leading to the fulfilment of sannyasa in one's life. This process is the sadhana and the attitude of sannyasa.

## **God – the essence of life**

We need to understand how to find a balance in expressing the sannyasa qualities. In brief, the tradition of sannyasa begins with God. God is not selfish. God cares with equal intensity for each and everyone. We can learn this lesson by observing a tree, which nourishes not one or two flowers or fruits, but all the fruits and flowers that take birth on the tree. God is the most selfless and compassionate and caring aspect of one's life. God is the essence of life. That essence vibrates within each one, regardless of whether or not we believe in God. It is not through intellectual comprehension that we realize this transcendental reality, but by experiencing its vibrancy in our life.

A sannyasin tries to connect with this vibrancy, which can be experienced in many different ways. Different situations

can become catalysts to provide an understanding of this vibrancy. One sannyasin may say, “Just teach yoga and don’t worry about anything else,” while another may say, “Retire to the mountains, live in solitude, take a vow of poverty and chastity and live a pious life.” Whatever the case may be, it is not the mind which appreciates or accepts, but the heart which has to learn how to appreciate and accept. This learning comes by knowing one’s conditioning in life. Not all conditioning can be understood rationally because we are also influenced by irrational conditions.

### **Realize you are free**

Once a camel caravan was travelling through the desert. One night, when the camels were being tied up to their hitching pins, the camel drivers discovered they were one hitching pin short. If the camel remained untied, it could wander away during the night and become lost to the caravan. An elder suggested that they go through the motions of hitching the camel without actually tying it up. When they did this, the camel, thinking it was tied up, lay down quietly and went to sleep. The next morning the camel would not move. Ultimately, the wise man came to the rescue, saying, “Just go through the motions of untying the camel in the same way as you tied it up.” As soon as they did that, the camel got up and was ready to move. Although the camel was not bound, it believed it was. We are also like that camel.

Paramahamsaji used to say, “We are sick because we think we are sick, we suffer because we think we suffer, we feel pain because we think we are experiencing pain.” All these different situations represent the conditioning where we begin to believe what we are not. So what do spiritual masters do? They simply go through the motions of untying us, and then we feel we have become free and we act free. We begin to develop the understanding and awareness that we can now move. Intellectually, we may think that now we know we are free, that nothing can stop us anymore. But knowing is not enough, realizing is more important. This realization of the vibrancy in life, the same vibrancy which connects the

individual with the universe, is experienced as we undergo a change in our attitudes and progress in our sadhana.

### **Aim of sadhana**

The aim of sadhana is not to make one spiritual, with the idea of becoming a 'prophet' with an eye on 'profit'. The aim of sadhana is to remove the accumulated impressions and ideas and to become innocent, pure and simple. There are no shortcuts. Continuous effort, regularity and belief in sadhana are important factors in a sannyasin's life. This process gives us an understanding of the sequence and flow of spiritual vibrancy as it has come down from God to the present generation. Once we begin to experience this vibrancy in the form of an inspiration, an understanding or balanced emotion, we become free and vibrant in our own lives, and the instincts which have governed us until now are transcended.

There are four basic instincts. The first is the craving for satisfaction, whether in the physical, sensorial, mental, emotional or intellectual sphere. We are all subject to this instinctive conditioning. The second form of instinct is fear, the insecurity that crops up when we feel we are going to lose objects or people which give us satisfaction and pleasure. The third instinct is sleep, not in the sense of sleeping at night, but in relation to hiding away from things that we consider unattainable and too difficult to manage. Sleep is closing the eyes to reality. The fourth instinct is becoming many from one, which is known as procreation, sexuality. These are the instincts which tie a person down to the mundane sensorial plane.

Desires are not bad. It is our perception of these desires that we need to understand. If we become free from desire, then all the ties that hold us down to this body and to this plane will be shattered, and we will cease to exist in this space, in this body, in this society, in this time and in this dimension. The sannyasa ideal is to convert the desires that hold us down to this dimension and to increase their power, strength and efficiency in order to experience something different, sublime, transcendental and divine.

## **Sannyasa lifestyle**

The sannyasa lifestyle comes in here in order to develop an understanding of the conditionings, instincts and desires that hold us down. If sannyasa were only a mental process, one could live in any way one liked and be a sannyasin. People ask whether they can live a material life and also be a poorna sannyasin, whether they can raise a family and be a poorna sannyasin, whether they can live in society and be a poorna sannyasin. By poorna sannyasa we mean the total ideal of sannyasa. In fact, in the past there was great debate by different masters of the sannyasa tradition. They came to the conclusion that the ultimate ideal of sannyasa is different from the ideals of social and material life. Therefore, the tradition does not accept relationships in the strict sense of the word, because when we are involved with these conditionings, desires and instincts, we are definitely feeding our mind but starving our spirit.

The spirit desires to be free from the conditionings of the mind. In sannyasa we feed the spirit and transcend the mind. If we view things from the perspective of our conditioned self, such actions and attitudes seem very hard and difficult. To an unconditioned mind it does not matter, but initially many people who live according to their conditioning find it very difficult to manage the conditioning that influences and colours their perception of life. To aid this process, a lifestyle is incorporated within the tradition. This lifestyle helps one to become free. The needs of the body and mind are channelled and directed through the process of yoga and other sadhanas. In the strictest sense of the word, sannyasa is not for everyone. One needs drive, motivation, courage and strength to face the reality that exists within.

Of course, there are no simple solutions for managing the conditions we encounter. But there are right choices. Many years ago Paramahamsaji told me, “Never expect simple solutions in life, but look for the intelligent choices which can help you to overcome situations.” If we can witness ourselves in times of pain and pleasure, trials and tribulations, successes and achievements, we will realize that there are no simple

solutions. There are only the conscious choices we make in order to achieve the sense of satisfaction, completeness and wholeness in life.

We all make such choices, sometimes consciously and sometimes unconsciously. When we make a choice consciously, we are recognized as being a strong person, with a strong personality and a strong mentality. When the unconscious choice moves us, we must recognize ourselves as having surrendered to the divine will. It is important never to allow any situations to become barriers to spiritual progress. There has to be wisdom and realization of one's strength.

### **Copying the master**

Once a master and some of his disciples came down from their hermitage to the local town at the bottom of the mountain. They had all entered the hermitage at the same time, lived the same life and practised the same sadhana for forty years. In the town the master walked into a hotel and ordered a big barrel of wine. The disciples said, "Well, if it is alright for the master, it is alright for us. If the master is able to drink wine, then why can't we also enjoy it?" After staggering out of the pub, the master went into a red light area. The disciples said, "Well, if our master can go there, then why not us?"

After some time, they continued wandering down the street and came across a man melting glass. The master stopped, picked up a container of molten glass and drank it, whereupon the disciples said, "Only the master can do that, it is not for us." If you have the will to copy, then copy everything. If you have the will only for enjoyment, then you can definitely only reach a certain point and not progress beyond it. Only when we are able to change our conditioned perceptions do we truly become free from the conditionings that hold us down.

We can definitely make an attempt to realize that spiritual vibrancy that is the source of our life. It is the fountain of life, the philosopher's stone that exists within us. This light is shining brightly, but it has many coverings. To see

the brilliance of the light, it is necessary not only to switch it on, but also to remove all the coverings that inhibit the projection of light. In the same way, the clarity and brilliance of the spiritual self is clouded over by the coverings of our conditionings, instincts and desires. Therefore, when we make an attempt to come into contact with that fountain of joy which is within, we have to integrate three things: lifestyle, sadhana and connection with the tradition.

### **Flow like water**

Realizing sannyasa means placing trust in the inner qualities and strengths for the development of life, which is experienced personally and also globally. In today's context, sannyasa gives us the ability to flow like water. Water always flows downward, it never flows up. Water always goes around obstacles without fighting or struggling with them. Can you compare yourself to water? You want to flow up, you want to confront obstacles rather than go around them. Sannyasa is a flow from the head down to the heart. Sannyasins develop an understanding of the situations that inhibit their creativity and manage simply by moving around the obstacles. Once we begin to flow, eventually we will lose our identity when we find the source.

It is said in the scriptures that the spirit resides in the heart, but when we begin searching for it, we start with the head. Once we find the spirit in our hearts by flowing down from head to heart, then union takes place, just as the river loses its identity after merging with the ocean. Sannyasa is learning how to flow with adjustments, without coming into confrontation in action, how to flow in love, how to flow in unity. In today's context, this is the lesson we can derive from the sannyasa way of life and the sannyasa ideals. Let those who have the strength and courage walk the narrow path. Let those who have the will and desire to appreciate and understand also begin the journey by walking the broad path.



## Satsang 3

**In his teachings, Swami Satyananda said that life is a combination of positive and negative and if there are no conflicts, tensions, passions, jealousies, anxieties, hatreds or worries, the mind would become very dull. But isn't one of the sannyasin's goals to free the mind from these negative feelings and emotions? What does coping with these feelings mean?**

Do you know how long it takes to free the mind from these traits? This freedom cannot be attained just by desiring that the mind becomes free. We must have the ability to accept the positive and the negative forces because both come from our inner being, our inner perceptions, our inner understanding. What makes you fight against the negative and accept the positive? Why are we unable to recognize that the negative is also a creation and expression of the human nature and personality?

The major cause of suffering in the world today is our inability to accept the other side of our personality. Not only Swami Satyananda, but also every master in every spiritual tradition has told us to accept both. We have to learn not to reject what we consider to be bad and accept only what we consider to be good. It is only when we recognize something to be restrictive and limiting that we make an effort to go beyond that situation. It is only when we recognize something as negative that we make an attempt to convert it into something positive. This leads to a deeper knowledge,

a deeper vision or wisdom in relation to ourselves. With this increasing awareness and deepening wisdom, eventually we become free.

**Is it important in ashram life to give others recognition when they deserve it and to apologize when it is required? How can one live and work with people who are not able to recognize the qualities of others or who cannot apologize when required?**

The ability to give recognition and to be humble lies not in the environment of the ashram, but in the environment within you. It is a part of your nature. This human nature should go with you wherever you are, whether in an ashram or in heaven or hell. If you are able to express those qualities which are part of your own self, then you will be considered as a good human being. If you expect recognition or apologies from another person, it is your expectation, and you should deal with it yourself.

You can walk up to the person, grab them by the scruff of the neck and say, "Apologize!" Or you can simply let go of that expectation and not bother about it. The important thing is that you are human yourself. Do not worry about others; let them evolve at their own pace, in their own way. If we are all able to express the human qualities within us, the whole world will become a positive place where we can support and nourish each other.

**Could you please elaborate on the practice of having one's head shaven, both on the physical and on the spiritual levels.**

Hair is a great source of attachment. People care about their hair because they think it makes them look beautiful and that others will appreciate them. But attachment to beauty has no place in spiritual life. Rather we are concerned with inner beauty. Also, hair does not allow the vitality of the sun to filter through the skin into the brain.

**Even if we manage to love in a universal way, we may still feel more love for certain people. How can we love specific people who touch our heart more than others and yet be detached?**

It is natural that there will be a deeper attraction towards a person with whom there is deeper empathy. Love is an expression of the mind, but empathy is a deeper expression of the mind. While it is possible to love everybody in the same manner, it is not possible to have that empathy or intensity of connection with everyone. Empathy means a fusion of hearts, and this is not a common affair. Love can be a common affair. Masters may love their disciples, but the love is deeper and more intense and more like empathy when it comes to God. If we project that empathy outside and begin to see God in every living creature, see the manifestation of God in every object, without distinction or differentiation between the God within and all around, that state is yoga, union.

**Please give us specific examples of how it is possible to be detached from our daily occupation and obligations, emotional commitments and material and financial obligations.**

You need to become your own example because other examples will be of people who are not you, and you cannot be them. What example shall I give? Shall I give the example of Ramakrishna Paramahansa, who had the ability to eat human excrement with the same gusto as halva. Why do we look for examples when they do not relate to us? We have to realize where we are in our life and understand that process of personal development. We can definitely derive inspiration from the lives of those people who have undergone the process, but we cannot tread in their footsteps; we have to create our own path. In order to walk in another's footsteps, you have to become that person. Your stride may be large and mine may be small, mine may be large, yours may be small. How can we match each print equally and uniformly? Therefore, begin to practise yoga and meditation, start to observe yourself, become the drashta. This has been the

message of yoga. To be the *drashta* means to become the seer, to be the observer of one's situations and actions, of where one is in life. Use the wisdom as a tool to overcome your insecurities and difficulties. That wisdom also has to come from within.

Once Mullah Nasruddin was called to give a lecture. He had absolutely no interest in doing so, but it was a very important meeting with many people expecting to hear words of wisdom from him. So he forced himself to walk to the stage and said, "Do you know what I am going to speak on today?" Everybody said, "No." Mullah said, 'If you don't know what I am going to talk about, it is better if I don't speak.' And he left the stage.

Some of the organizers were bright enough to trap Mullah. They called him again and he asked the same question. This time the organizers had prompted everybody to say yes, to which Mullah replied, "Since you know what I am going to talk about, I will go." And he left the stage. The organizers trapped him again. Mullah repeated his question. This time the organizers had planned that half would say 'yes' and the other half would say 'no'. When Mullah saw this, he said, "Those who know please explain to those who don't know," and he walked away once more.

In applying knowledge to deal with life's situations, we have to make our own choices. These choices are not just following the directions given, because sometimes the directions may not be compatible with our situation. Only those who are able to let go of their ego can follow directions. We are not ready to let go of our ego, which is associated with our understanding, intelligence and actions. So there has to be adaptation to whatever guidance we receive. Therefore, spiritual traditions have always said, "Search for the answer within yourself."

Intellectual interpretations only indicate a process by which you can come to the source of wisdom inside. Adjustment has to take place in your own behaviour, in your own life, whether in relation to family, finances, society or spiritual commitments, but the vision has to be yours. The

drive and the motivation should be based on acceptance and realization of the situations that you wish to change. You need to have a focus. You need to have an aim for your life before you try to find answers to such questions.

**Is there a special reason for the different colours of the clothes that sannyasins have to wear? Why this difference? Why can't we wear our own clothes? I think real feeling is seated in the heart and has nothing to do with the outside. In nature we are all the same.**

In nature we are not all the same. Out of six billion people in the world can you find two who look exactly the same? Physically we are not the same, emotionally we are not the same and even if you clone yourself, you will not be the same; the clone will be just a slightly faded carbon copy of you. The qualities are also different in each person and we express them according to our understanding at that time. Only a person who has realized the entirety of human experience can become established in the heart and become free. As long as we do not have the ability to understand the entire situation, we have to follow a discipline to make us realize that identity.

You are definitely not the first person to think about this. Many thousands of years ago, people in the tradition posed the same question. It was decided that in order to create a structured discipline which could help develop the various facets of human personality, there has to be a system, a sequence in understanding. This development in one's life begins on the external plane, but eventually helps us to find a source of balance in the inner plane. It is also a gift of inspiration and trust that the master has given, which has to be appreciated. If this appreciation does not exist in the relationship between master and disciple, then what is the use of adopting a path or a person and saying, "You are my master and this is my path?"

This is the first contradiction that we need to overcome. We ask the master to give us a direction, a path, a system, trust and love, and then we say, "OK, thank you for giving

me all this. Now I will manage myself and live my life as I wish.” What was the use of receiving his gift in the first place? This is not something that can be explained through logic or rationality. It has to be experienced when you are able to tune yourself with the concept of spiritual discipline.

The various symbols act as catalysts to alter a mind pattern. Shaving the head acts as a catalyst to alter a mental perception. Wearing a colour helps to alter the pattern of the mind. The awareness, trust and faith that go with it help to alter a pattern of thought. This alteration leads to a transformation of the conditionings, and when you are free from the conditionings you experience greater freedom. Once you begin to feel that freedom, the external symbols do not mean anything.

Unless you are hungry you will not be attracted to any kind of food because it will have no meaning. Similarly, in order to satisfy the spiritual hunger, these disciplines are given. Then it is important to know the systems adopted by the traditions to reach the state of fulfilment. There is nothing in the world that does not follow a system or sequence. From birth to death we follow a natural system. In life we follow a social system. Such questions are guided by the social conditioning. If you can overcome that conditioning, you will help yourself. If you can't, no matter how much guidance you receive, you will not be able to move forward an inch.

**When the rational mind is trying to attain vairagya, it can fall into a circular thinking trap. How is non-attachment to spiritual goals and sannyasa itself achieved? That is, how important is samadhi in the pursuit of sannyasa?**

Firstly, when the rational mind attains *vairagya*, non-attachment, it does not fall into a circular thinking trap. That circular thinking trap is *raga*, attachment, not *vairagya*. Secondly, how is non-attachment to spiritual goals and sannyasa itself achieved? The answer is to first define what your spiritual goal is and what your feeling for sannyasa is and then we will talk about non-attachment from these things. Thirdly, how important is samadhi in the pursuit of sannyasa?

Samadhi is the subject of yoga, not of sannyasa. Samadhi is described in yoga; creativity is described in sannyasa.

**I have read and heard that you were born through the creative will of Swami Satyananda. If this is true, what does it mean?**

It is true, but will you be able to understand and accept it? Are you able to understand that Christ was born of a virgin mother? Or is it just a belief? Is it possible? Has it happened to anybody else in the history of the world? There are some things we just accept, some things that are guided by faith and not by the realities that surround us. You will not be able to understand it, and we should not even talk about it. Maybe when we no longer exist, somebody can tell the real story, but this is not the time.

# Crossing the Ocean

Yoga gives the inner vibrancy with which to nourish the roots of life. We then move on to another level of activity, which is realizing the connection that a human being has with nature and the divine. In vedic times people attempted to experience and understand this connection through the process of yajna. Yajna is not a religious practice; it is an attempt to connect with the inner source. Invoking the cosmic powers to manifest, and opening ourselves up to experience that universal power descending into our life is a very natural spiritual aspiration for every human being. Each civilization, culture and community has evolved ways of experiencing this descent of energy and each bears testimony to the personal desire of the individual to become universal. If love for God is universal, if the experience of God is universal, if the existence of God is universal, then how can we, as human beings who are an expression of God's nature, remain self-centred and self-contained? There is a natural, deep drive within us to overcome self-centred perceptions and to experience the spiritual joy which unites us with the forces of creation.

## **Connecting with the inner self**

The outer expression of this drive can be seen in our attempt to love and be loved, to be friendly and to become friends. If human beings did not have the drive to develop and expand, we would withdraw ourselves and not seek love



and companionship. The attempt that we all make to find happiness, love, peace, friendship and companionship in the outer dimension is only an indication of a process that is internal. All the traditions have said to direct within, towards your inner self or being, what you express externally for others. If you seek comfort by loving others, experience that love internally. If you seek comfort by searching for friendship and recognition outside, find that comfort by experiencing recognition and friendship on the inner plane, by connecting with your inner self.

During wartime an army commandant called his soldiers and said, “You have to be very strong and brave because there will be face to face combat with the enemy.” One soldier raised his hand and said, “Excuse me, commandant, would it be possible for you to introduce those people to us beforehand so we can come to some agreement?” Maybe this is the approach we need to adopt with ourselves. There is face to face confrontation with our own selves. There is a constant struggle, which all the spiritual traditions say need not happen. Meet yourself face to face and come to an understanding. Then there will be no need to fight or struggle.

There is always a drive to realize our true nature. We will realize our true nature when we begin to recognize the beauty and the auspicious qualities that uplift us. It is a matter of recognizing the truth that nourishes us. Emancipation does not come by isolating ourselves from this drive to understand and experience our inner nature. Rather, emancipation, happiness and peace come when we are able to commit ourselves to that inner motivation which leads us to experience our own strength. This should be the aim of those who think about spiritual life, who take initiation or adopt a specific path, because ultimately we all come back to our centre, whether we like it or not.

### **A sannyasin is a ferryman**

It has been an auspicious beginning for the new millennium to see the coming together of various approaches, which

may be culturally different, but have a common aim. It has been a good beginning in Greece, too, because twelve people have been initiated into poorna sannyasa. Twelve is a lucky number for any kind of beginning. Twelve is a combination of one and two. One represents one vision and two represents the person and the effort of the person to reach out to other beings. One plus two equals three, representing the qualities of omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence. These new poorna sannyasins should know that they have not taken initiation for their peace, emancipation and freedom.

There are many people who wish to cross the ocean of samsara. Sannyasins are the ferrymen. They spend their entire lives on the ferry going from one side to the other, but never actually belonging to either side; their only effort is to take others across. We have twelve new ferrymen who will help other people across. The good wishes, love and support of everyone will go a long way in building up their confidence and strength.

Prior to poorna sannyasa they may have aspired to be able to cross over one day and find comfort and luxury. Now they have to sacrifice that desire. By sacrificing that desire, they have taken a greater responsibility upon themselves. While others can sometimes enjoy relaxing on the boat when they travel, the new sannyasins will have no time to rest. They will have to struggle to push the oars continually, and in this way they will begin to understand in the course of time what hard work really means. As sannyasins they represent the drive, the motivation and the will which can take people from one side of the river to the divine source. Each experience in life is a challenge and from it we can learn wisdom. Open yourselves to that learning and challenge, and you will find that you will be able to sail smoothly. Our love and good wishes, support and affection reach out to all of you.

## Connecting with the Source

Ishwara is not a title, it is the name of the Almighty. The Almighty is perceived in manifest form through different avatars and in the non-manifest form as qualities which uplift the soul to ultimate union with the transcendental nature. The avatars or guides on the physical plane in physical bodies are recognized as Sri Rama, Sri Krishna, Jesus, Buddha, Mohammed or by other names. But when we talk about the impersonal, non-manifest nature of God, what name or identity can we give? The qualities which uplift human beings are those which represent different aspects of divinity. Therefore, it is said that the nature of God is *Shantam*, peaceful, *Satyam*, truthful, and *Sundaram*, beautiful. Other names are *Shivam*, the auspicious nature, *Brahman*, the ever-expanding consciousness, and *guru*, one who dispels the darkness of ignorance. We can call them spiritual qualities, indicating that they represent divine qualities.

There is one door which never closes. When we visit a church, mosque or temple, we find a notice on the door saying, "This is the house of God. This is the doorway to heaven," but underneath in small print is written, "Closed from 6 pm to 10 pm." The external door can be closed, but not the inner door. The inner door remains open all the time. In order to open the inner door, people have to overcome the animal instincts.

## **Reuniting with the source**

As we go further away from the source of our inspiration, havan is an attempt to recognize those qualities and efforts that can inspire our mind to unite again with the source. We have had a very beautiful rendering of the feeling that the disciple expresses to the guide, who is both external and internal. In this expression of devotion and faith, there is an offering which represents the surrendering of our own personality and soul. Everything that nourishes life is offered and ultimately life itself is offered. Food, which nourishes the body, is offered. Water, which quenches the thirst, is offered. Odours, which are pleasant to the olfactory nerves, are offered. Beauty, which is perceived by the eye, is offered. Mantras and prayers, which alter our inner personality, are offered. Ultimately, life itself is offered because life is the nourishment for the expression of the divine.

## **Just you and God**

If we wish to make it a brighter day, there is definitely a need to give. It is a choice we can all make: the choice to improve, to become better and to save ourselves from further cloudiness of spirit. We can definitely make it a better day when it is a matter of our relationship with God. It is a matter of there just being 'you and me', God and the individual. There is no better way to live life than by following this sentiment.\_

## Satsang 4

### **Why does human nature have a more natural inclination towards negative emotions?**

A basic lack of discipline and understanding of our actions is one of the major reasons why we are pulled towards destruction and not towards creativity. Creativity and peace imply that we understand ourselves and other people, but when we are unable to understand ourselves and direct our own expressions, it leads to a restrictive expression of human nature. Therefore, we again come back to the basic understanding of yoga, which is awareness.

### **Please talk about attachment and detachment.**

What is there to talk about? You attach, you detach; you plug, you unplug. We feel threatened by the idea of detachment because it threatens our self-security. But there is a natural law of absorption and elimination. The food that we eat is absorbed and then eliminated. On the mental plane too, the experiences we absorb are eliminated after we have gained a deeper understanding from them. If we do not release them, we become mentally constipated.

Just as we resort to purgatives to release physical constipation, we also have to resort to purgatives to release mental constipation. The mental purgative is meditation. When you meditate, you become aware of the deeper attachment which causes pain and suffering, anxiety and insecurity. This purgative is often called detachment. But

yoga believes in non-attachment, not detachment. If you are asked to look after a television set while the owner is away, you will take care of it, but you will know that it does not belong to you. Similarly, life, the body, mind and the objects that surround us are entrusted to us so that we may experience joy, happiness and beauty. But the idea of 'mine' comes in, that possessiveness causes attachment, and often there tends to be misuse and abuse rather than use.

However, when we believe that this life has been entrusted to us, that this body has been given to us with a purpose and we have to take care of it, that is non-attachment. In non-attachment there is use, not misuse or abuse. Non-attachment is a state of mental perception, a state of mind where clarity dominates, not confusion.

**What is the best way to help a person who shows attachment and dependency towards us, so they can become free and independent?**

There are the three 'don'ts' in relation to attachment and dependency. First, people who are being depended upon should feel the pressure of that dependency, and not reject it. Second, they should not isolate themselves from the person by saying, "I need to find my own time and space because you are too demanding." Third, they should not criticize the other person's dependency.

Now for the 'do's'. First, you should create an environment where the dependent person feels supported and guided. That environment is the expression of your love and understanding of their situation. Second, help them to find the source of strength within themselves. This can happen if the dependent person is asked to analyze the causes of their dependency. Third, when the causes of dependency are known, and when you also recognize that these are valid causes of the dependency, then pick one cause and try to manage it. When the person recognizes, "Yes, this was the cause of my ruffled feathers, and there is a way to work with it, to smooth it out," then self-confidence and self-esteem will be developed. Then pick another cause and work with that, then another

cause, and so on. Under no circumstances reject the mental state of the dependent person. Maintain your understanding or appreciation.

Dependency is always a manifestation of crisis, and the reason for that crisis lies in some other direction. It can be emotional dependency, but even emotional dependency is as strong and powerful as drug or alcohol dependency. Remember that clapping does not happen with one hand, but with two. It is not the dependent person who is at fault; it is you who live around that person who is also at fault, because it was you who started the crisis. Then there is the question of incompatible natures, unfulfilled expectations, and the whole process that influenced the sensitivity of the mind. So, before you start helping the dependent one, help yourself.

**Is indifference the expression of a tamasic mind? What is its main cause? Is it maybe the feeling that others do not recognize you? How can someone stop the negative thoughts and programming of the mind?**

It is not possible to stop the negative thoughts. Human nature is negative right from the beginning. If we look at ourselves and how we have coped with different things in our life, we will realize it is true. It is never difficult to criticize others, but it is very difficult to appreciate others. It is never difficult to feel aggressive and violent, but it is always difficult to feel the non-aggressive, non-violent state. It is never difficult to express jealousy, hatred, anxiety and anger, but it is always difficult to express balance. It is never difficult to be subjected to the negative tendencies arising out of fear and insecurity, but it is very difficult to find a balance in expressing the positive qualities of life. It is easy to become selfish, but difficult to become selfless. So if this is the expression of our personality, is it good or bad, is it positive and going in the right direction, or negative and restricting human creativity?

In yogic terminology, *tamas* means stagnation. Water becomes stagnant when there is no scope for free flow. Air

becomes stale when there is no other source of air coming in or going out. In order to have purity and clarity in nature, rotation is the law. But if we apply that principle to ourselves, we feel threatened that we will lose our individuality and the basic precepts that ground us to this reality. When other people tell us to learn to let go of things, we say that they are trying to take away our individuality. Nobody in the world wants to get stuck with the hang-ups of another person's life, least of all the spiritual masters. Would you be happy if your husband, wife or children dumped all their negativity on you? When we cannot accept that from one person or two or three, how can we expect the gurus or masters to be able to handle the difficulties of the whole world?

Self-preservation and self-identity are contradictory ideas based on fears and insecurities, and not on the transforming qualities and situations which can enhance the beauty of life. Yogis have recognized these conditionings of mind to be of three types: tamasic, rajasic and sattwic. In the tamasic mind, the idea of not letting go, not being willing to change, adjust and adapt to different situations is very powerful. In the rajasic mind, the idea of control, of personal manifestations, of governing situations is very powerful. This can happen at personal, family, communal and social levels. In the sattwic mind, there is acceptance of the changes and transformations that can reduce the influence of negative expressions and increase the experience of positive expressions.

Yoga tells us that it is no use trying to change the nature of the mind. Rather we should understand its nature by becoming a witness to what is happening and adjust to that nature so that it does not restrict our expressions. In order to do this, there has to be a basic process of elimination and absorption. What you eat and drink is absorbed by the body and then eliminated by the body. Meditation provides the tool by which we can absorb what is happening in our inner dimensions and eliminate the unnecessary things.



**In your thirty-five years of practising and understanding yoga have there been times of doubt, and in those moments how did you cope with it?**

What was there to doubt in my life? I have only one goal, which is to discover my inner self. If doubts come, they are coming from within and if understanding comes, it comes from within. Yoga has given me the ability to realize that both are coming from within. Doubt can only be one stone on the road; you may fall, but you can get up again and keep on walking. Doubt or confusion or dissatisfaction is a momentary event in people's lives. Those who want to subject themselves to the influence of doubt and disbelief are free to do so. But as practitioners of yoga we come to understand that life is a journey towards fulfilment and wholeness, not for getting lost in doubt. If you stumble and fall, what do you do? Do you simply remain lying on the ground or do you make an attempt to get up and keep on walking? If you can answer this, you have the answer.

**What is the meaning of life?**

Learn how to laugh. Learn how to love. Learn how to live.

**How are we going to learn how to laugh and how to love?**

Did you learn how to be angry or jealous? Nobody taught you how to express anger and frustration, so why do you need to learn how to love? It should be a spontaneous expression of understanding and adapting to a situation. You can truly love if you can put yourself in the shoes of the other person, but make sure that you can shape your feet to fit their shoes.

**In Greece, when the heart, mind and feelings are full, we dance. Will you join us?**

Let us dance with our feelings and aspirations for this country and culture. There are many stories about the cross-cultural exchanges that took place between India and Greece. One story tells us that the word 'therapy' was formed from an association between Greeks and Indians. When skirmishes

broke out between the armies of Alexander the Great and the Indian kings, many soldiers from both sides were left to die on the battlefield. After one such skirmish, Alexander and his people saw a frail old man giving water to the wounded, binding their wounds and trying to heal them with herbs and other items.

Alexander asked for the man to be presented to him. He said, "We are strangers to your country, yet you are helping my soldiers as well as your own." The man replied, "The profession to which I belong does not allow me to see you as an invading army, but rather to see people of both nations as human beings who are wounded and need healing." When Alexander asked him his name, he said, "My name is Theravan." Thus the word therapy was born for the process of healing.

So, whether in an individual sense or in cross-cultural exchange, there has been a lot of Greek influence in India and Indian influence in Greece. Due to changes in the geophysical and political environments, in the course of time the two countries drifted apart, but the spirit that once united these two nations is still vibrant and still continues to unite the people. Let us all open our hearts and minds and enjoy the beauty and growth that life can bring us. This is not only a hope or wish. It can be achieved when cultures, people and countries unite in yoga.

There was a very simple poet saint in India by the name of Kabir. Many people would go to him for guidance and he would answer their questions. One person asked Kabir, "What shall I do in my life?" Kabir said to him, "It is evening time, it is getting dark, the sun is about to set, go home and don't worry." The man bowed and went home. The other people sitting there said, "What kind of answer was that?" Kabir replied, "Ask the man what he understood."

When they asked the man if he understood Kabir's answer, he replied, "Yes, he told me that it is getting dark, which means I am getting old. He said that the sun is about to set, which means that my life is about to end. And when he said that I should go home and not worry, he was telling

me that I should go back to the source, and there I will find tranquillity.” So when I say that I’m leaving soon, but I’ll come back before the end of the day, you will understand what I mean.

# Yoga and Personality Transformation

Ziridi School, Athens, March 27, 2000

Greetings from the ancient land of India and from the ancient culture of yoga. In creation, the human being is the centre of all experience. By using the faculties of head, heart and hands properly, the human being develops externally and internally, and finds an expression that can be construed as artistic, creative, philosophical, material, scientific and spiritual. Yoga has recognized that there are immense possibilities for human growth in all dimensions – social, physical, emotional and psychic. This understanding of human nature has defined the development of the science of yoga in the past as well as today.

Yoga is not Indian or Eastern, it is the heritage of humanity. Yoga gives us the ability, strength and courage, not to fly in the air or read other people's thoughts, but to stand on our own two feet. This ability represents a connection that we develop between body and mind, mind and spirit. We experience this connection as an integration of the head or intelligence, the heart or emotions, and the hands or action. Unification of the various dimensions of the human personality is yoga.

## **Body, mind and spirit**

Yoga means union. Philosophically, some people interpret it as union of the individual self with the cosmic self. It is an interesting idea, but we have not experienced it. What we can experience through yoga is the manifestation of

human creativity in all aspects of life. The practices of yoga can lead us to experience health in the physical dimension, tranquillity in the mental dimension and awareness in the spiritual dimension.

Today it is recognized that the body, mind and spirit are integrated; there is no division and no separation. The body is the manifest experience of life in the realm of matter. The mind is the subtle force within the body and it expresses itself uniquely in each individual. The spirit is the substance, the foundation, for the development of life.

Just as the roots are the foundation and cause of the growth of a tree and all its expressions, the spirit is the source and cause of life and all its expressions. In yoga, the whole of life has to be realized in order to experience fullness and completeness. Therefore, yoga has three distinct systems, one for the body and the attainment of physical health, the second for the mind and the attainment of inner peace and tranquillity, and the third for the spirit and the attainment of a deeper enlightened awareness.

### **Discipline in yoga**

Despite beliefs to the contrary, yoga is not a set of physical practices or postures. The classical text called the *Yoga Sutras*, written about five thousand years ago by Sage Patanjali, opens with the statement, “Yoga is a form of discipline.” The second statement is, “Through this discipline you gain the ability to control and direct the patterns of your mind.” The third statement is, “Once you are able to direct the expressions of the mind, you can tune yourself with your inner nature.” These three statements have become the foundation for the development of the yogic traditions and systems.

What is the role of discipline in yoga and what do we mean by discipline? In a modern context, discipline means an organized structure. In physical terms, discipline means following a pattern in which our body is accommodated according to its biorhythms. In general terms, discipline means following a system in which there is no imbalance. According to yoga, however, discipline is not a routine

to which we adhere, but control of the subtle expressions manifesting externally in our thoughts, behaviour and actions. In yoga, discipline is awareness of the subtle experiences and expressions and realization of the inner personality.

### **Experiencing good health**

This inner personality does not exist without the support of the physical body. Therefore, in order to develop an understanding of the body as it relates to the inner personality, yogis evolved and developed the system of physical postures, *asanas*. In the present age, researchers and scientists have investigated the effects of asanas on the human body and mind, and have discovered that the greatest imbalances can be removed with the simplest practices. Physical imbalances and illnesses are managed with the practice of asana. Imbalances in the realm of vitality and energy are balanced with the breathing techniques, *pranayama*.

Researchers have found that the coreect application of yoga techniques can help to manage illnesses such as diabetes, asthma, digestive disorders, circulatory problems, even cancer. There is a lot of scientific evidence available today to show that many illnesses and diseases can be removed by practising asana and pranayama, so that the body experiences total health. How does this happen? Science will say that imbalances created by sedentary lifestyle, stress and tension, affecting the performance of the internal organs, are managed. But from the yogic perspective, health is attained because we become aware of the needs of the body and we learn to adjust to its requirements, to tune the biorhythms to our lifestyle and environment, and experience health.

### **Befriending the mind**

The mental dimension is possibly the most important aspect of yoga. The human mind has always been a mystery. How does the mind behave? How does the mind work? How does the mind interact with other people and the environment? How does the mind attain wisdom, and how does the mind realize itself? There are no absolute answers, only an ongoing

process of discovery. In our own lives, we can definitely see that the mind plays a very important role in our expressions and behaviour. But how do we train the mind? How do we awaken the potential of the mind through yoga? People who study yoga say it is necessary to control the mind, but people who practise yoga say it is necessary to become friends with the mind.

Once a king was given four beautiful but wild horses, which nobody could ride. He issued a proclamation offering a handsome reward to anybody who could train them. Many great trainers tried, but without success. One day, however, a man appeared and said, "I will try to train them on condition that they are left free for a year." A year later he returned, riding one of the horses with the other three following behind obediently. When the king asked the secret of his success, the man replied that he had simply made friends with the horses and let them be free. When they ran, he ran with them, when they stopped, he stopped, when they ate, he would eat. Eventually, the horses allowed him to touch them and then, gradually, to ride them. By making friends with the horses, they came to trust and accept him.

As you know, once you become friendly with yourself, you begin to remove the fears, insecurities, anxieties and stresses that afflict the mind, and you are able to direct the mind in a better way. What did Alexander do when he was given a horse that was afraid of its own shadow and would not allow anyone to ride it? He simply turned the horse around and when it could not see its own shadow and was not frightened, the horse allowed Alexander to ride it. This indicates that we have to allow the fears and insecurities of the mind to leave before we are able to direct it. However, to say that this can happen through meditation is not enough, because meditation is a very broad subject with a number of dimensions.

### **Dimensions of meditation**

In the first dimension of meditation, yoga says to observe the nature of the mind, to observe the pattern of the thoughts

and behaviour, know that they are manifesting and that they exist within you. It may be a restrictive negative mentality at first or it may be a positive uplifting mentality, but realize that these dualities exist. If you are truthful with yourself, you will know that you always hide from yourself. The negativity of the mind influences us and we hide from it.

We try to suppress many of the restrictive dimensions of the mind because we feel uncomfortable with them, yet they are part of our personality and we have to recognize that part. So the first dimension is recognizing the mental states as they exist without shying away from them like a wild horse, without shunning them or repressing them. When we relax in this state of recognition, there is no tension, no anxiety. We learn acceptance.

In the second dimension of meditation, we try to concentrate our mind on an experience. In the third dimension, we intensify the state of concentration. In the fourth dimension, we begin to meditate on recognizing and transforming the restrictive aspects of our nature into optimistic and positive expressions. This allows us to experience inner relaxation and tranquillity, to develop self-confidence, self-esteem and an appreciation of life, to become aware of the human qualities that can uplift our personal and social life. This is the yogic process which leads to greater harmony of body, mind and spirit, to greater appreciation of life and our expressions.

When the body and mind are in harmony, that state is recognized as spiritual experience. Spiritual experience is understanding the joy and beauty that exist within us and around us. This experience nourishes our mind and our body, so we can make the effort to understand our role in life.

### **Versatility of yoga**

For a person who is sick, yoga becomes a form of self-therapy because it allows us to discover the causes of imbalances, which can be physical or psychological in nature. For a person who wishes to find their centre of being, yoga becomes a process



leading to that experience. For a person who wishes to realize his or her own religious beliefs, yoga becomes a process to further deepen their understanding. We have to understand that yoga is a process that deals with life. Whatever our life may be, yoga nurtures a lifestyle that is in harmony with oneself and nature.

Realizing this, today people are applying yoga in various dimensions of human society. Yoga is applied in industry for human resource development, in sports to develop stamina, vitality and athletic abilities, in schools to develop the personality, memory, attentiveness and general discipline, in hospitals to alleviate illness, in space research to study the effects of zero gravity on the body, and in the defence forces to manage the psychological problems soldiers face on duty.

Yoga has come out of the caves and mountains into the research laboratories of scientists and doctors, and from there it is now being applied for the betterment of the human personality. It is a tool with which we can appreciate the beauty that life has to offer and learn to be happy, healthy and to live in harmony.

**Yoga was preserved in the mountains and caves, and in many ways this safeguarded this knowledge. Could the expansion of yoga into society at large have some dangers with regard to protecting the yogic knowledge? Could it be misunderstood or misused?**

There is an ancient tradition, dating back about five thousand years, known as the sannyasa tradition. In the modern context people define sannyasa as renunciation and sannyasins as renunciates, and I belong in that category. In this tradition of sannyasa there are different schools of renunciates. The order to which I belong is non-religious and non-denominational, and has a mandate to preserve all types of human knowledge and to propagate it whenever humanity needs it. The major drive in the propagation of yoga around the world has been from sannyasins whom the west today calls masters or gurus. But you need to remember that it is a mandate that we have followed for at least five thousand years.

The problem is that when people see sannyasins teaching yoga, they think that yoga belongs to a religious denomination. This is one reason why yoga has been considered to be an eastern belief or religion. To such people we say, "If you want to know what I am, don't look at how I eat or dress, but look at how I think and how I behave." It is the sannyasins who will again take yoga back to the caves and mountains if they see that it is being misused. Then you will not hear from us for another five thousand years.

Tell me, is there anything in this world that is not dangerous? The knife that chops vegetables in your kitchen can also be used to kill somebody. People have died from overeating. Is food a killer? Whenever we use an instrument, there must be a component of human wisdom involved. When you practise yoga, it is to develop the qualities of wisdom, awareness and understanding. These qualities act like the brakes of a car when you suddenly find yourself out of control.

If maturity of mind and consciousness were not developed through yoga, yoga would be useless. It is this maturity of mind that guides you to perform the appropriate action. When the mind is not mature, there is confusion between what is right and what is wrong, appropriate and inappropriate. But yoga is self-correcting. So I do not see any such danger, and I am not apprehensive about it.

# Discovering Human Potential through Yoga

Goethe Institute, Athens, March 28, 2000

Until now the common understanding has been that yoga is a series of physical practices leading to health, wellbeing and vitality. There is also an understanding that yoga is a series of meditation practices which help to release tension and stress and enable us to attain inner tranquillity. However, the yogic tradition tells us that yoga should be understood in relation to the human personality, and not in relation to our thoughts, ideas and beliefs.

Historically, yoga is not Indian, nor is it part of eastern mysticism. It is a philosophical way of looking at and interacting with life. It is a lifestyle that allows us greater understanding and expression, and it is also a discipline. Ancient philosophies have expressed the same thoughts as yoga. What Aristotle and Socrates taught were ideas or philosophies in relation to the development and understanding of the human personality, not as a part of any religious belief. The same concept applies to yogic knowledge and understanding, which is an approach to realizing life.

From the yogic perspective we realize life by understanding the various dimensions of the human personality. Modern psychology tells us there are four main personality types: dynamic, intellectual, emotional and psychic. The dynamic personality is constantly working with the body, senses and environment. The intellectual personality is reflective, thoughtful and seeks understanding and knowl-

edge. The emotional personality is sensitive, considerate and kind, and feels oneness, compassion and love for all. The psychic personality wants to discover the dormant potentials and hidden dimensions of consciousness and life. Yoga came to this understanding about five thousand years ago and devised a set of practices applicable to the realization of the total potential of each of these personalities.

### **Hatha yoga and the dynamic personality**

For the dynamic personality, yoga identified the series of practices which are today known as hatha yoga. Hatha yoga aims at awakening the vital forces in the body and mind. Yoga recognizes that there are two main forces governing our life. On the physical dimension it is experienced as sensorial vitality, and on the mental dimension it is experienced as the force of the mind. The practices of hatha yoga develop integration, balance and harmony in the expressions of physical and mental vitality. This vitality is recognized as *prana*, the life force, also responsible for the motion of the senses and the mental faculties.

Yoga believes that most of the stresses and tensions, illnesses and diseases which are physical or psychological in nature are caused by an imbalance in pranic vitality. Scientists who have investigated the effects of hatha yoga on the human body and mind have concluded that most psychosomatic diseases and illnesses can be effectively managed with the correct application of yoga practices.

We know that psychosomatic problems arise due to stress and our inability to manage the situations that afflict our mind and affect our body. Today we know that stress is the cause of hypertension, cardiovascular problems, insomnia, mental imbalances, digestive, respiratory and circulatory problems. We have even forgotten how to relax and how to sleep. It has been shown statistically that tranquillizers outnumber all other forms of medication combined. The question is whether we wish to live a life where we have lost our inner harmony and depend on chemicals to rest, relax and sleep? The practices of hatha yoga play a very

important role as they recreate a balance in the energy, stamina and health of the body. Today there are many hatha yoga teachers who teach the postures, breathing techniques and other physically oriented techniques to enable people to find psychophysiological balance.

### **Jnana yoga and the intellectual personality**

As you know, our intellect plays games with us. Sometimes we are not able to differentiate between right and wrong, just and unjust. The intellect is a tool to gain more knowledge. However, although we gain knowledge, our intellect cannot apply it to enrich our life because it is not trained to do so. Mental conflict, confusion and distress result when our intellect is clouded and unable to differentiate good from bad, harmony from disharmony. To manage the intellectual dimensions of the human personality, yoga came up with the systems of jnana yoga. Many people who do not know the right application of jnana yoga or the systems taught in jnana yoga say that it is a process of asking questions like, “Who am I?” “What is my role in life?” However, that is intellectual musing, not jnana yoga.

Jnana yoga is a process of internalization of awareness where reflection, understanding and knowing the intricate movements of personality is the aim. Any form of meditation that we do in order to deepen the knowledge of our personality is jnana yoga. Jnana yoga is a series of meditative practices that allows us to discover how thoughts, emotions and deeply rooted psychological impressions influence our behaviour and actions. Some of you will have read that jnana yoga is the yoga of self-enquiry, but it is not. It is a process of developing and increasing inner awareness. The meditative techniques are progressive and sequential, and they allow us a deeper understanding of the nature of our personality, and how the intellect interacts in life to either beautify or destroy it.

### **Bhakti yoga and the emotional personality**

The third type of personality is emotional. We have not yet learned how to express our emotions because we have been

taught not to express them. The trend in the world has been to awaken and stimulate the intellect, not the emotions. We care more for our IQ, intelligence quotient, than for our EQ, emotional quotient. To appreciate life, to understand our role in society and our duties and responsibilities for the betterment of ourselves and the social environment, there has to be a balance between intellect and emotions.

Only in the last few years have people started to talk about developing positive emotions. Psychology will have to work very hard for another couple of decades to develop an understanding of emotional human behaviour. However, yoga has been approaching this subject for a long time through the principles and practices of bhakti yoga. Scholars generally translate the word bhakti as devotion, but from the yogic perspective, *bhakti* is channelling the emotions in the right direction to make them more positive.

Emotion is a force, an energy, a power. Yoga compares emotion to the image of a crystal ball. A crystal ball will reflect the colour around it, but the nature of the crystal ball is to be transparent and clear. When our emotion attaches itself to money, greed is reflected. When it comes into contact with our offspring, affection is reflected, with our adversaries, jealousy and competitiveness are reflected, with fear or insecurity, frustration and anger are reflected. When our emotion is associated with an object of desire, passion is reflected. Emotion colours the perceptions of our expressions.

Emotion can be managed through the practices of bhakti yoga. Through these practices we reach the stage where we experience unity with our environment and understanding of the situations and conditions that surround us. But it seems that we need to work harder to understand the expressions of our emotions. We lack a basic education in how to express our emotions. We are told not to cry, that crying is bad, to be more self-assertive because it will lead to success, and that expressing emotion is a sign of weakness. But this is not so. Expressing an emotion with understanding becomes a force to develop deeper comprehension and appreciation.

It is this very emotion that can lead to transcendence and not bondage. What do we look for in the world? We look for love, compassion and understanding, which come from emotion, not from logic or intellect. Because we lack a basic understanding of the emotional process, we search for happiness outside, for situations in which we can experience tranquillity. But the preceptors, teachers and thinkers have always told us that the source of wholeness, happiness, joy and peace is inside, not outside. When we hear such words we say, "Oh what a beautiful philosophy, what a beautiful idea!" but we are not able to implement those ideas in order to realize those emotions. Bhakti yoga, through a series of practices such as mantra chanting, introspection and reflection, allows us to understand the emotional personality and structure in a better way and to express it.

### **Raja yoga and the psychic personality**

The fourth type of personality is psychic. Psychic means something that comes from the depths of our consciousness and has no connection or association with intellect and logic. In fact, the greater part of our expression is psychic. In order to realize the psychic dimension of personality, we have to go deep into the realms of consciousness. According to science, one-tenth of our brain is active at present and the rest is inactive. What would the state of a human being be if the total potential of the physical brain were developed and expressed? We are able to achieve so much with one tenth of our brain faculties. If the entire brain were to become active, the possibilities are staggering.

It is the same with the human mind. Psychology has compartmentalized the mind into the conscious, sub-conscious and unconscious in order to understand the mental processes. But the yogic tradition has gone a step further. It says that beyond the conscious, subconscious and unconscious, there is the supermind which represents consciousness becoming aware of itself. This is a difficult concept to understand. How can consciousness become aware of its own self?

We can compare the entire field of consciousness with the ocean. On the surface of we can see due to the sunlight, but as we dive deeper, the light diminishes. When we reach the bottom there is absolute blackness. Imagine if the entire ocean was illumined with light. How would we perceive it? The sun is awareness and the ocean is consciousness. As we go deeper into our own consciousness, awareness decreases. The decreasing states of awareness are recognized as the subconscious and unconscious. However, if the same intensity of awareness was maintained even in the deepest levels of the unconscious, imagine the luminosity that we would experience within, reflected in total consciousness.

The psychic dimension of yoga is approached and experienced with the practices of raja yoga, kriya yoga and kundalini yoga. The total luminosity of consciousness in relation to raja yoga is known as *samadhi*, in relation to kriya yoga as the opening up of the dormant energy centres or *chakras*, and from the viewpoint of kundalini yoga as the ascent of the primal energy called *kundalini*. The underlying factor in all yoga practices is self-awareness and discipline. Self-awareness plus discipline equals yoga. We only have to understand this concept to understand the goal that yoga tries to attain. Through discipline we are able to realize our own nature, to control the dissipations of human nature. This has always been the yogic way of thinking.

### **Harmonizing body, mind and spirit**

We live in the dimension of the senses and body, and that is our first experience of life. The second experience is the mind in the form of thoughts, emotions, ambitions and desires. The third experience, which takes a long time to come by, is understanding the source of life, the spirit. Because the body is the first experience, it becomes the basic tool for our inner journey. Therefore, yoga begins with the performance and practice of physical postures. Remember that when the body is still and quiet, the mind also becomes still and quiet.

When you practise physical postures, you are not only working with your body, but also with the mind, the emotions



and the spirit. The balance, wellbeing, health and vitality you experience in the body through performing physical postures affects the mental dimension, the psychic dimension and the spiritual dimension. In this way, even the most basic of the physical practices can help one to achieve internal balance and harmony. This process is further intensified when we combine physical postures with concentration, relaxation and meditation techniques. In this process, unity, harmony and integration of body, mind and spirit is experienced. Yoga comes full circle, which means union.

# Applications of Yoga in the New Millennium

Buckland Hall, Wales, United Kingdom,  
June 8–11, 2000





# The Satyananda Yoga Tradition

This gathering is a new beginning for yoga, not only in this country, but the world over. Until now we have been trying to understand the philosophy, system and tradition of yoga, but the time has come when we need to apply yoga to improve our lives, and not only our lives but the society and the world in which we live. Therefore, the theme of our gathering is the applications of yoga in the new millennium. We need to understand yoga in the context of our present day environment and discover how we can derive the benefits from this ancient practice.

Yoga is a very broad subject which deals with the management of physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual states. There are many schools of yoga in the world today. Yoga should not be confused with religious beliefs or groups. Yoga is also different from the *sannyasa* tradition to which I belong. I belong to a tradition of *sannyasins*, renunciates, who dedicate their lives to preserving the *vidya*, knowledge, and bringing to light and disseminating the appropriate knowledge of human development according to the need of the time. *Sannyasa* is our personal life, and yoga is our professional life. Yoga should be understood as a science which deals with the management and development of the human personality, harmony of body, harmony of mind, and experience of spirit.

Today, however, we have forgotten to look at the big picture and we only see a very small point. Imagine a black and white

computer printout of the world. If an ant were to walk across the printout, it would only see a white field with black dots, but if the ant were raised up, it would see the complete picture. We have to develop that awareness. At present we are wandering around looking at little black dots all over the place and we are unable to see the big picture, which represents the whole of humanity.

The greatest challenge in our life is to follow the laws that tell us how to be a complete human being. This is where yoga comes in. Yoga is a system of philosophy and practice which provides an understanding of the integrated human personality and a united human society. With this end in view, yoga practitioners, over thousands of years, developed a series of practices by which we can attain physical health, mental harmony and spiritual upliftment. The Satyananda Yoga tradition is a global yogic vision which embodies this integral approach.

### **The lineage**

The inspiration for the Satyananda Yoga system, also known as the Bihar Yoga system in India, emanates from a lineage of masters whose concern was not only individual spiritual development, but also the integrated development of human society. The tradition of Ganga Darshan began with Swami Sivananda Saraswati, a highly qualified medical doctor, who seventy years ago renounced his flourishing medical practice in Southeast Asia to become a sannyasin and lead a yogic life. He felt that people were sick not only in body, but also in mind and spirit, and therefore needed to be healed on all levels. He inspired research into the ancient traditions to investigate the benefits of yoga for the development of the human personality, thus instigating the integration of traditional yogic wisdom with modern scientific knowledge. Many were inspired to follow him on this path, to live according to the will of the divine, in the service of others, with love and compassion.

One of the bright jewels in his crown was our guru and teacher, Swami Satyananda, who continued this inspiration,

and has been a force for developing yoga from a scientific perspective around the world. Prior to that, yoga was seen as a mystical, religious and philosophical subject. Due to his efforts, researchers began to investigate and discover the effects and benefits of yoga for the management of physical, psychological and spiritual imbalances. The main mission of Swami Satyananda's life has been to inspire people to live a balanced and harmonious yogic life, to understand the needs of others and to dedicate their efforts to helping others. It is a life in which wisdom and action are harmoniously integrated, where the inner perceptions are in harmony with the outer environment, and in which self-sacrifice is recognized as the highest achievement.

Swami Satyananda teaches that only those who live for others truly live, and that those who think only of themselves and their ambitions live dead lives. This statement may be difficult to understand, but these are the sentiments of one who has consecrated and dedicated his life to uplifting and realizing the spirit within everyone.

### **Ganga Darshan**

Ganga Darshan yoga ashram in Munger, India, is the headquarters and the inspiration for the propagation and development of the Satyananda Yoga system. In Sanskrit, *Ganga* means 'purity' and *darshan* means 'vision of'. A vision of the pure, awakened self is the aim of Swami Satyananda's mission. It is also the inspiration for the International Yoga Fellowship, a movement of yogic-minded people dedicated to the upliftment of humankind. Ganga Darshan is the home of Bihar School of Yoga, Bihar Yoga Bharati, the Yoga Research Foundation and the Yoga Publications Trust, and also works to uplift the underprivileged through Sivananda Math. Today, Ganga Darshan yoga ashram is a movement in itself, reaching out to help people find health, hope, happiness, prosperity and fulfilment in their lives. Although many of the activities being conducted are at present in their infancy and on a small scale, they have global connotations. The message of integrated yoga is being propagated around the world by the

Satyananda Yoga Academies and Satyananda Yoga centres and ashrams worldwide.

### **Bihar School of Yoga**

Bihar School of Yoga, the original institution established by Swami Satyananda in 1963, is dedicated to the propagation of yoga. Today, it conducts courses with the emphasis on bringing yoga closer to people's lives. Health management courses are conducted for general ailments and for specific ailments such as respiratory disorders, diabetes, gynaecological problems, hypertension and digestive problems. Teacher training and stress management courses as well as specialized, advanced courses are also conducted to deepen the understanding of yogic procedures and to increase awareness of the depth of human potential. Yoga cannot provide all the answers for the suffering of humanity, but through its principles and practices it can definitely contribute to the betterment of human health and wellbeing.

The work being carried out in India today by Bihar School of Yoga exemplifies the wide scope of the applications of yoga. In January 2000, at the request of the Sports Authority of India, we began conducting short and long term training programs for athletes, coaches and physical training teachers to improve physical and mental proficiency. The Indian archery team also underwent training in yoga practices for two months in the ashram.

BSY conducts specialized training programs for instructors from the army to improve physical, mental and emotional fitness. Instructors from the Bihar Military Police, who have very stressful jobs, are also trained in yogic practices. At the request of the Bihar Ministry of Health, which has identified thirty-six physiological disorders that can be treated and managed with yoga practices, training courses in yoga therapy are being conducted for medical students and doctors in medical colleges. A long-term and large scale project has begun to provide yoga training for the engineers, officers and employees of Indian Railways.

Since 1995, we have taught yoga to thousands of inmates in twenty-four prisons in Bihar, and the inmates have shown a significant improvement in mental and emotional wellbeing. Five hundred prisoners have also been trained as yoga teachers.

Such activities are being conducted not only in India, but worldwide. Internationally, Satyananda Yoga is being applied, for example, in drug and alcohol rehabilitation, addiction, with the physically and mentally challenged, prisoners and HIV-positive patients.

### **Bihar Yoga Bharati**

The culmination of Bihar School of Yoga has been the establishment of Bihar Yoga Bharati, the yoga university, which is dedicated to higher yogic learning and has brought yogic education into the academic field. We established BYB in 1994 as an Institute of Advanced Studies in Yogic Science, and applied to the Government of India through the University Grants Commission for recognition as a yoga university. In March this year, Bihar Yoga Bharati was officially recognized by the Indian Government as a deemed university. BYB is the first university in the world devoted entirely to yoga. Courses have been established in yogic studies: a four-month undergraduate certificate course, a one-year undergraduate and a postgraduate diploma course, and two-year postgraduate masters courses in the fields of yoga philosophy, yoga psychology and applied yogic science.

The teaching given in yoga philosophy is not only philosophical, but involves research into the tradition to discover the relevance of the ancient practices for modern times. Yoga psychology is an emerging field. How did people manage their psychological states before the advent of modern psychology? Many of the answers can be found in the yogic tradition. The opening statements of Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* indicate that yoga is a process of mind management. Other yogic texts provide many references, ideas and techniques which have helped in the management of human emotions, the human psyche and human behaviour.



Applied yogic science is a most important area in today's environment because it aims to integrate yoga into society. Students are trained in how to use the yoga practices for the betterment of human behaviour and the streamlining of human resources.

In the future, we plan to include yoga ecology, which will look at the individual's relationship with the environment and nature. We have inherited this planet not from our fathers, but for our children, and it is our duty to ensure the health of the planet for the future of our children. Yoga ecology will not become a political movement, but will remain a yogic attempt to understand the interrelationship of human beings, nature and the universe, and how we can learn to live in harmony with nature and the environment. New subjects will be added from time to time to further enhance our understanding of yoga.

Students from more than thirty countries are participating in the training imparted by Bihar Yoga University. Therefore, it is a university in the truest sense of the word – creating a global awareness. On completing their courses, students have been given positions as yoga teachers and therapists in various medical institutions, schools, colleges, industries, corporations and other institutions. We have arranged on-campus interviews to facilitate this process.

Another achievement for Bihar Yoga Bharati has been the signing of an agreement with Cheju University in South Korea to assist in establishing a yoga department there. Negotiations are underway to establish departments of yogic studies in universities in Venezuela and in Colombia, in order to investigate the effects of yoga on the management of crime, drug addiction and sexuality. A Satyananda Yoga Academy has been successfully established in Australia, and discussions are underway to establish an academy in Europe, where higher yogic learning can take place.

This is the direction in which yoga will evolve in the twenty-first century. Gone is the time when we practised yoga just for personal gain. Now we teach yoga for the purpose of managing the social and environmental stress afflicting people throughout the world.

### **Yoga Research Foundation**

Swami Satyananda established the Yoga Research Foundation in 1984 to conduct scientific and medical research to define the role of yoga in the management of respiratory disorders, cardiac problems, digestive disorders, pregnancy, arthritis, spondylosis, blood pressure, gynaecological problems, diabetes, cancer, HIV+, drug addiction, and so on. The practices of yoga are brought into the light of scientific understanding so that they can be applied to manage illnesses and disorders in society. Projects are being undertaken to investigate the role that yoga can play in cancer and other life-threatening diseases.

### **Yoga Publications Trust**

Established in March 2000, the Yoga Publications Trust is responsible for disseminating yogic and spiritual knowledge, lifestyle and practice through the publication of text books, magazines, research materials, practice texts, audio and video cassettes and multimedia presentations, nationally and internationally.

### **Sivananda Math**

Sivananda Math, also the brainchild of Swami Satyananda, is dedicated to the ideals of Swami Sivananda, which are service to humanity with love and compassion. It is dedicated to uplifting the weaker, neglected sections of society, particularly in rural areas. Sivananda Math has adopted twenty-one villages, involving 10,000 families, in a remote rural area, and looks after their welfare, medical care, education, clothing, housing and self-employment requirements. Initially, many people found it difficult to understand the reasons for involvement in social, material development instead of yoga teaching. However, if yoga is a personal process of realizing the good within, then service to others is the external expression of that good.

The *ashtanga* yoga or eightfold path of Sage Patanjali begins with *yama* and *niyama*, moral codes of conduct and personal discipline, followed by *asana* and *pranayama*, postures and breathing techniques to energize the body. Then come

the practices of *pratyahara* and *dharana* to relax and focus the mind, culminating in *dhyana* and *samadhi*, to experience the union and harmony within. These eight steps represent a process of personal effort to achieve the highest in life.

The eightfold system developed by Swami Sivananda represents yoga for the benefit of human society. When you have achieved the highest through classical Sage Patanjali yoga, then you begin Sivananda yoga, expressing your achievements for the benefit of others. In Sage Patanjali's yoga you analyze, observe and realize, then in the Sivananda system you act, perform and express. This expression takes place through eight steps: serve, love, give, purify, be good, do good, meditate, realize. The first expression is serve, love, give, purify. Once you become purified through service, you become good and you do good. Once you start doing good, the good action becomes meditation, and that meditation leads to realization. If Sage Patanjali's yoga is esoteric yoga, Sivananda's yoga is exoteric yoga.

### **Paramahansa Alakh Bara**

At present Swami Satyananda is living and practising higher sadhanas at the Sri Panch Dashnam Paramahansa Alakh Bara in Rikhia, which is dedicated to providing guidelines for the tradition and principles of sannyasa. The sannyasa tradition does not represent adherence to any particular belief or religion. The ideals of sannyasa which Swami Satyananda promotes through example are *viveka*, the ability to discriminate between right and wrong, positive and negative, *vairagya*, dispassion or non-attachment, and *seva*, service, compassion and dedicating one's efforts to the higher self.

Ultimately, sannyasa is offering our faculties and abilities for the development of the environment in which we live. It is realizing that our environment is no different from the cosmic environment, that we are a reflection of the cosmic reality. The Paramahansa Alakh Bara guides sannyasins to understand these principles and to express the qualities of compassion, love and service, to be truly human.

## **Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal**

Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal, the Children's Yoga Fellowship, was established in 1995. BYMM is dedicated to the development of the total personality of children between the ages of seven to fourteen, when they are most receptive. Yoga believes that education is much more than the academic teaching given in the school system. How we are going to evolve and respond to life's situations are important issues in everyone's life, and yoga tries to provide the answers.

The process of education in the world today emphasizes intellectual development. We have learned to believe that the higher the IQ, the better the person. However, often the higher the IQ, the less able one is to interact positively in society. One is not able to relate or communicate with other people because there is an imbalance. The human personality is a combination of the qualities of head, heart and hands. If we work with our intellect only, there is lop-sided personality development. The IQ or intelligence quotient is related to the intellect. The EQ or emotional quotient is related to the heart. There is also the SQ or social quotient. These are the three components of personality: intelligence, emotions and interactions, or head, heart and hands. The aim of the Children's Yoga Fellowship is to integrate all three aspects.

The Children's Yoga Fellowship is a very dynamic movement. At the end of 1999, after only five years, it had over a thousand yoga teachers and demonstrators, who are all children and who teach yoga better than all of us, because they can understand their students' problems. Once I was meeting with the Department of Education in New Delhi to discuss guidelines for incorporating yoga into school education. A group of children between the ages of seven and ten accompanied me, and gave their views on the content of the syllabus to the education specialists. They said, "You decide what we are going to learn without knowing our problems. We, the children, want this form of education," and they gave an outline which was much appreciated by the department. Let us hope that a balanced education system can evolve in the course of time, one that will look into all three aspects of

a child's personality. Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal is a movement in which children are taking responsibility for their lives, for their education, for their attitudes and for their behaviour.

### **The Satyananda Yoga system**

The question often arises, "How is the teaching and training imparted by Bihar School of Yoga different to other yoga institutes, traditions or systems?" We have been working with yoga for the last forty years to develop a particular vision in relation to the human personality. The concept of Satyananda Yoga is defined in the logo, a red circle and a blue circle. Red represents *ida*, the dynamic sun, vitality and energy, and blue represents *pingala*, the passive moon, tranquillity and peace, representing balance between body and mind. When the body is disturbed, the mind will be dissipated and unable to concentrate or meditate. Only when the body and mind are in harmony can spiritual experiences manifest.

Satyananda Yoga is an integrated approach to yoga. It does not highlight one dimension, but incorporates all the different yogas to achieve completeness or wholeness. The system is designed to promote physical health through the classical practices of hatha yoga. Mental stability and wellbeing are promoted through the raja yoga practices of mind management: pratyahara, dharana and dhyana. Psychic blockages are cleared and healthy emotional expression promoted through mantra and bhakti yoga. Through the classical practices of kriya yoga and kundalini yoga, the practitioner is taken on a journey of self-discovery.

In the new millenium, it is more appropriate to talk about self-discovery rather than self-realization, because realization is a relative term. The process of self-discovery encompasses the entire human personality. Ultimately, one is provided with the wisdom to attain external and internal prosperity, not financial or social prosperity, but prosperity of nature, character and spirit, the ability to live happily and joyously, in a contented manner. The yogic concept of prosperity is contentment, which comes with wisdom. Once you have

contentment, no matter where you live or how you live, you are always at peace with yourself.

### **The major yogas**

The Satyananda Yoga system is an integration of components from all the major yogas, providing the means to explore the human personality in one continuous, sequential form. Hatha yoga touches the physical and psychic dimensions. Raja yoga covers the mental, psychic and spiritual dimensions. Bhakti yoga encompasses the emotional, social and spiritual dimensions. Karma yoga involves physical, emotional, social and spiritual participation for the development of society. In this way, each yoga has the ability to influence a particular aspect or dimension of our whole life. The Bihar Yoga or Satyananda Yoga system accesses and integrates all the diverse areas of life in which human beings participate and interact.

What are the components of the physical, mental, emotional, social or spiritual dimensions that we try to awaken and develop through the practices of yoga? The World Health Organization defines health as not only physical, but also mental, social, emotional and spiritual. In the physical dimension, we are looking for health, vitality, flexibility, strength, relaxation, self-control and grace. In the mental dimension, we aspire for relaxation, concentration, improved memory, clarity, creative expression, balance between emotions and thoughts and developed awareness.

In the emotional area, we are looking for equanimity, self-acceptance, inner peace, self-control, transformation, and devotion. so we can become beings who act rather than react. Devotion means one-pointed awareness, not in a religious context, but through the channelling of emotions in a positive direction.

The social dimension of yoga is experienced through service, interacting with others with greater clarity and wisdom, which gives awareness of the social environment, understanding and acceptance of responsibility and life itself. People ask why love is not mentioned. The social definition of love is distorted, because it is sensual and physical. Unless

you love yourself, you cannot attain physical health, mental equilibrium or spiritual development. Only when you love yourself will you be able to appreciate the beauty that life has to offer. Love of life, love of beauty and love of humanity are the important factors that motivate and propel us to develop an expanded awareness and vision. Love is the strength that we use to attain fulfilment in yoga.

The spiritual dimension represents the culmination of an integrated personality, outer and inner, expanded awareness, union of head, heart and hands, compassion, intuition, surrender to the cosmic will and self-realization. Self-realization does not mean realizing the spirit, but realizing one's duty for the betterment of oneself, the environment and the universe.

Over the last forty years these are the areas we have tapped through the applications of yoga. The Satyananda Yoga system is an evolving system, concerned not only in teaching yoga, but in going deep into the tradition of yoga to revive and systematize the techniques. The highlights of these discoveries include concentration and meditation techniques, the practice of yoga nidra, and the systematization of the practices of asana, pranayama, mudra and bandha and other yogic practices, which have now been made accessible to the ordinary practitioner. This is an ongoing process.

We have to understand that when we are able to help others, we will find peace in ourselves. When we just try to help ourselves, we will only open more doors for the accumulation of more desires that can never be satisfied. Therefore, the principle of yoga is give, give and give. Let this be our resolution. Let us give and give, and not ask and demand.

# The Spiritual Journey

Two things are important on the spiritual journey. One is harmonizing the mind, which takes place with the practice of mantra, and the other is managing the lifestyle. Our lifestyle is represented by the quality of our perceptions and interactions. A saint and a sinner can live in the same apartment and eat the same food, but their perceptions and interactions will be different. Although their external surroundings are the same, their responses to the same situation or event will be different.

The meaning of lifestyle can be expressed very simply. If you want to know who I am or what I am, don't look at how I dress or what I eat, but look at how I think, behave and act. Thinking, behaving and acting are the three aspects of our lifestyle, and we have to train ourselves to think, behave and act in a way that is appropriate for the development of the human personality. Adjustments have to be made to the normal lifestyle so as to be in tune with *prakriti*, with nature.

Social and material development, the so-called achievement of human civilization, has taken us away from the source of nature, not only from the external nature, but also from our internal nature. The more we move away, the more we condition ourselves to think, act and respond in specific ways. When spiritual ideas evolved, their main purpose was to free the mind and consciousness from the conditions we have created around us. This change begins to take place through self-observation.



We have to open our eyes at some stage. Sleeping is enjoyable, but there is a limit to it. Opening the eyes is called diksha. In Sanskrit, *diksha* means the ability to see the path. Initiation is the English version of the word diksha, but it is an inappropriate description because diksha involves more than initiation. Initiation is not becoming a member of a club. It is our commitment to use the best within us. Initiation simply opens a door and reveals the path we need to take. We have to realize the conditionings that have altered and polluted the purity of the mind.

### **Mantra diksha**

Mantra is one form of diksha. The aim of mantra is to become free from the mental conditioning. Mantra is a collection of sound vibrations which activate and alter our psychic personality and subtle nature. Activation of the subtle personality harmonizes the functions of the senses, intellect and emotions. Many people say mantra can make you enlightened, but the tradition says it cannot. Our experience says it cannot. Mantra can indicate the path you have to walk, but the purpose of mantra is to remove the self-created conditioning.

Mantra is a vibration of power with the ability to internalize the extroverted mind, to focus the dissipated mind, and to overcome and transcend the limiting negative factors of our life. It is a process by which we can induce a state of harmony between intellect and emotion. If we are sincere and committed to the practice of mantra, and we do it in the spirit of sadhana, with regularity, continuity and conviction, then it becomes a very powerful tool to open the doors of perception. Therefore, it is a gift of life.

Mantras are not religious chants, spells, or words associated with different gods. If you look at the descriptions of the chakras in tantra, or Vedanta, or Samkhya, you will find that each chakra is activated and stimulated by various sounds, the *bija* or seed mantras and other mantras that you find written on the lotus petals of the chakras. Mantra is a combination of these vibrations, helping us to access

the psychic and so far unreachable dimensions of our personality. It is a sadhana in itself, a very high spiritual sadhana, provided that we can merge with and focus our mind on the vibration of the mantra. But it has to be practised daily, regularly, in order to create a condition that is conducive to the proper expression and development of our nature.

You can take mantra diksha any time, but first you need to prepare yourself. If you want a seed to grow, first you have to prepare the soil, enrich it and ensure that the right conditions exist for the seed to germinate. Your effort is to create the right environment for growth. But how many aspirants make that self-analysis? How many of you have taken mantra diksha without first preparing the soil of the mind? Did you dig deep into your mind and analyze the quality of the soil? Does it have the potential to germinate the seed of the mantra, or do you need to add more compost?

With any form of initiation, don't take it just because it is being given, but think about it. Try to find out if you are ready or not. If you don't feel the need, then don't take it because it will be a worthless effort. If somebody pushes your head underwater, you will struggle to come up for air. The effort you make to avoid drowning is the same effort you need to make for the fulfilment of mantra diksha, or any kind of sannyasa initiation. If you don't really feel the urge, then don't force yourself, but if you feel the necessity, then take it. No one will say no to you. But you have to recognize what your need is first.

### **Liberating the mind**

Yoga defines mantra as *mananaat trayate iti mantrah*, the energy or force which liberates the mind from bondage. The mind is constantly being influenced by the senses, the body, the environment and the situations with which it associates. This influence is known as attraction and repulsion, *raga* and *dwesha*, and it is the cause of conflict and disturbance in personal and social harmony. We did not come into this world simply to raise a family, receive a degree, work, earn

some money and then die without contributing anything to the development of human society.

The purpose for which we have come into this world is to experience enlightenment. Enlightenment is not an abstract theory; it is a very definite process of knowing the connection that exists between the individual self and other beings, sentient or insentient, a process of discovering the connection that exists between the manifest body and the transcendental spirit. We are not here just to while away the time, but to find spiritual balance and harmony.

We also have to recognize that we do not know what spirit is. We have ideas and beliefs, but they are only speculation. Even the seers of the past, after expressing their opinion, in the end said, “Our conclusions are not final. We have come to a conclusion because we have seen something, but what we have seen is through our mind, which is conditioned, and a conditioned mind cannot define the unconditioned nature. Therefore, our statements are not final.” However, these experiences have indicated the progression and growth of the human personality and nature.

Imagine a map. There is a road going over a hill, around another hill and through the woods. There are mountains and gardens as well as the ocean. We have to walk that path, firstly by harmonizing the mind through the practice of mantra, and secondly by managing our lifestyle. Mantra is a way to transform the mind. Sannyasa is a way to transform the lifestyle. Mantra works at the mental level. Sannyasa works at the level of lifestyle. The combination of these two is like the force of an atomic bomb. It can lift the spirit from mooladhara to sahasrara in no time.

### **Sannyasa lifestyle**

Sannyasa is not and never was a religious order. The meaning of the word *sannyasa* is to put in trust the abilities, qualities and strengths which we all have, and to use them to create a change internally and externally. We can say that the lifestyle of a sannyasin is like that of a farmer. In spiritual life, we have to become farmers, not warriors. A

warrior leaves behind death and destruction, but a farmer is a creator, who has a vision and understands the process of giving birth to a new seed. He knows that it is necessary to till the soil and remove the weeds to ensure that the right conditions are created for the seed to germinate. In spiritual life, you have to become a farmer. You have to prepare the mind. You have to give the compost of positivity and creativity. You have to plant the seed of your resolve, your *sankalpa*, and ensure that the right conditions are always present for the seed to germinate.

We are an agrarian society. What comes up does not destroy life or change life drastically. It nourishes our life, and in that we see the unfolding of human potential. We experience the re-emergence of inner strength. The strength of the self in the external world is recognized as willpower, but in the spiritual dimension, in the yogic dimension, inner strength is recognized as the ability to discriminate between right and wrong.

### **Cultivating positive qualities at each step**

In order to understand the yogic lifestyle, sannyasa has given some pointers. There are qualities we need to cultivate at each level of initiation, because each level is like a new season. Spiritual life is not all light and love. Spiritual life is a process of change which can sometimes be painful when we identify with it and sometimes give us great pleasure when we see the emergence of a new person.

When we climb a staircase, for example, we place one foot on the first step, then the other foot on the next step. When that foot is firmly placed, the lower foot moves up. However, when we think we have to let go, renounce or change something in our life, we become disturbed and fear we will not find stability and security at the next step. But we are ignoring the fact that there is stability at the next step because we have already placed one foot there. We do not need to worry about what will happen if we leave the first step. This step by step process, the recognition that we have moved forward, is how positive qualities are cultivated.

Within each level of initiation, there is a set of qualities that we need to cultivate. Until twenty or thirty years ago, sannyasa was always seen as a strict order, because we were given the full bundle of things that we needed to grow in our life, and there were too many seeds to manage. Some people tried to modify this tradition by saying that instead of planting a thousand seeds, it was all right to plant a few only because this would nourish body, mind and spirit. Initially, we also said the same thing. But then, looking into the human personality and its expressions along the journey, we realized that one seed is not enough.

There are different needs within our body and within our mind. Our stomach and lungs have different needs, the senses have different needs, the mind has different needs. The mind is a collection of many subtle activities taking place at the same time. Although we say that the mind is divided into four compartments: logical, intellectual, emotional and intuitive, it is only a division to help us understand our nature better, not the final statement or understanding.

It is for this reason that yogis have said, “Let us acknowledge the three qualities of nature, the *gunas*, because they are a reality in our life, and to help manage them let us have the *yamas*, social responsibility, and the *niyamas*, personal responsibility.” As we try to build up our association with a particular *guna* or a particular *yama*, and as we strive and work towards it, we stimulate and activate the particular dimension of the mind which is associated with that *guna* and that *yama*.

### **Swami Sivananda’s eighteen ‘ities’**

Swami Sivananda gave us eighteen ideas, known as the eighteen ‘ities’. He said that in order to experience the total awakening of human nature, we should express these qualities in our life. In the beginning of the sannyasa lifestyle you work with the first three ‘ities’: serenity, regularity and absence of vanity. How you come to this point you have to decide for yourself. Are you regular in your effort? Are you serene in situations? Is there vanity in your life? Is it negative

or positive? Vanity is always negative, which is why it says 'absence of vanity'. We cannot be serene, regular and without vanity just through simple meditation, or by just feeling good and doing good. There is a continual struggle to be serene, to be regular, and to eliminate vanity from our life. This is the beginning of sannyasa, where we alter our normal perceptions and attain balanced perceptions.

In the next stage come sincerity, simplicity and veracity. We want to become simple, but we cannot. We make things too complicated for ourselves and also for others. The more complicated we make things, the more intelligent we think we are. The more simple we become, the more foolish we think we are because we feel we may lack some ability. Another person may say, "Oh, he's too simple, he doesn't know how to use his creativity," but if someone makes something very complicated, we say, "Wow! A lot of thought must have gone into creating that."

Veracity is truthfulness. Truth is removing the mask that you wear day in and day out with other people and with yourself, and trying to know your true nature, your true self. How do you look without the mask? In a mirror you only see a reflection of your face. To see your real face, you have to become the *drashta*, the seer, the observer.

In this way the process of sannyasa continues to evolve moment by moment, day by day, effort by effort, in this life and in other lives. Sannyasa is not membership of a club. It is a commitment to yourself to remove the masks that you put on when you are with your children, with your husband or wife, with your friends or peers. In every situation we project ourselves in a particular way. Even when we are alone, with nobody around, we carry many different people inside us. The sannyasa lifestyle eventually leads to an experience of the luminosity of human nature. All the great people who have shown the light in this world were sannyasins. Christ was a sannyasin, Buddha was a sannyasin, Ramana Maharshi was a sannyasin, Swami Sivananda was a sannyasin.

## **Death is the transformation of life**

We go through many different stages, so people change all the time and their relations with people and things are always changing. For example, you are not the same person who attended school as a student many years ago. Each stage we have completed in our life indicates the death of the person completing that stage. Death is not the absence of life, it is only the transformation of life. The spirit, which we recognize as the soul that enters this human frame, does not come from any other place but here. The entire creation exists within the spirit and is surrounded by spirit. It is only our identification with the present situation that makes us believe we are different and therefore must have come from somewhere else.

Life is nothing but an expression of consciousness and energy. When a pot made from clay is broken, it again becomes earth. The shape has gone, but the essence has again become one with the original essence. When we say death, we mean absence of this physical shape, the body, but this is not absence of life. This has been stated in the *Bhagavad Gita* in a traditional way. To put it in more modern terms, when you move from one apartment or house to another, you do not leave everything behind, but pack your photographs, paintings, clothes, furniture and then move. Similarly, when the soul, the spirit, leaves one body, it only leaves that one body behind, which is the empty apartment, but it packs its baggage. It takes the photographs just as we take our photographs. Those photographs are memory, *smriti*. The soul takes all the necessary things and puts them in a suitcase. The mind is the suitcase.

## **Spirit, mind and senses**

It is stated in the *Bhagavad Gita* (15:7) that when the soul is attracted towards prakriti, nature, it does not go alone, but with six friends. The first friend is the mind and the other five friends are the senses – *Manah shashthanindriyani prakritisthani karshati*. So, if the mind and the sense perceptions are going with the soul, how can that be death? You have simply left

behind an empty shell. Life expresses itself differently in different dimensions. In each dimension, according to the conditions, you adopt a body. But when you move from one condition to another, you leave behind the body that was suitable for one environment, but is not suitable for another environment.

We need to understand that the spirit is the energy and force that surrounds the whole of creation, just as air surrounds the entire planet. The spirit is recognized as soul when we become aware of movement in a particular field of activity. The air surrounding the planet, for example, we identify as a storm when it becomes more dynamic, or as a typhoon when it becomes very strong. Different manifestations and strengths of air are given different names. Air in itself is a passive element. When you go into a room and close all the doors, the air in that room is passive. When you turn on the switch and the fan rotates, it moves the air and you can feel the flow. The switch simply joins the two poles of energy together, positive and negative, to create a current which moves the fan. The spirit is like that, too. The nature of spirit is passive.

We have come here because of something known as the divine will, the cosmic will. According to religion, it is divine will, God's will. From a spiritual perspective, it is the cosmic, universal will. Will is the factor which brings the opposing poles of consciousness and energy together, and it creates a movement. This subtle movement is like a tornado. If you look at a picture of a tornado, you will see that it starts at a point on the ground and expands as it rises. The point of the tornado may be only ten feet away from you, yet you are unaffected by it. But as you go up, and the momentum, strength and intensity of the tornado increase, you cannot remain unaffected, and you get sucked into it.

The point at the bottom is known as *atma*, the spirit. It is the beginning of movement. Many people also call it *jivatma*, the individual soul, the individual identity. Its extension outwards is the mind and the senses. By the time the spirit manifests as sensory perceptions, the attraction and force



of the senses is so strong that we are sucked in. That is our identification with the body. It is so difficult to move out of that physical and psychological identification with the senses. When we are awake, we identify with our senses. Even in sleep we identify with our senses. They have a magnetic pull, and with this identification, we are unable to discover the nature of the spirit which is right at the bottom, as a point from where the movement of spirit has started.

### **Purpose of life**

Once the tornado stops, everything again merges with the air. There is no separate or distinct identity. So the difference between life and death is nothing but a new perception in the realm of consciousness and energy. We are here to know this process of living and dying. Our life's purpose is to know the totality of our nature. When we leave this body as an empty shell, we will again continue to live in order to know the totality of the entire life that is being realized by consciousness and energy. The package that goes with us contains the memories, samskaras and karmas, and we have to ensure that we take the right ones. It is no use taking unnecessary baggage, so take what is needed and what is useful. Be choosy and take the best. Have the best samskaras, the best karmas and the best memories.

# Balancing the Emotions

After many years of yogic practice, people still have difficulty balancing their emotions. Most of our actions are directed by our head, by the intellect, *buddhi*, while emotions, *bhavana*, the expressions of the heart, are not really understood. When we use the word ‘emotion’, it means movement of the subtle psychic self. The intellectual self is in the head, the psychic self is in the heart. The traditions have said that the soul resides in the heart centre. We should not interpret this as meaning that the soul is literally residing in the heart centre, but we should try to understand that soul means the psychic nature, the spiritual nature, and that the experience and expression of the spirit takes place through the heart. Therefore, the traditions have emphasized the need to nurture, develop and expand the feelings of love and compassion and all the positive qualities that emanate from the heart.

## **Harmonizing the gross and subtle natures**

Emotion is the movement and dynamism of the subtle psychic personality. This emotion is not what we experience in the form of anger, passion or frustration. It is not even what we experience in the form of love or compassion. Rather it represents a state of harmony between the gross nature and the subtle nature. That is real emotion.

What we express in our life is only a reaction which takes place between our feelings and their association with the mind. For example, we get angry because of an association

between the energy of the heart and the present experience of the mind, and that triggers off a reaction. Jealousy acts as a similar trigger. Anger, violence, compassion, equanimity and serenity are all expressions of an interactive process which is taking place between the head and the heart. But we can use these expressions to move towards a state of balance within by observing, analyzing and understanding where we are going wrong. Even the eradication of anger or the discovery of compassion and love are not the answers to finding harmony between the gross, manifest nature and the subtle, psychic nature which is lying dormant.

Human beings are extroverted by nature, identifying with the senses and the external environment. We have been looking out so much that we have forgotten to look within. We have lost touch, lost awareness, lost the quality of observation that can help us find equanimity between the gross self and the subtle self. Our experience of the interaction between the heart and the head is always just a reaction. We react, and we believe that reaction is an expression of our emotion. But yoga says no! The yogic term for emotions is *bhavana*, which is different from passion, *kamana*, and mental obsession, *vasana*. Here we are talking about *bhavana*, where there is harmony between the head and the heart.

In order to awaken the *bhavana*, the real emotion, the first condition is that we have to stop reacting. When we react, the intellect becomes clouded. The discriminative ability, *viveka*, no longer exists, and personal peace is lost. Even in love there is a conditioned expression of mind because there is always an expectation, there is always passion and desire, and these are also reactions. Yoga says to stop reacting. But this does not mean that you isolate yourself from what is happening around you. So yoga also says to be involved, but without reacting. It is an involvement that is flowing, and therefore you do not experience struggle, because flow is passive and struggle is reaction. This is the stage we have to come to in order to experience harmony between the gross and the subtle nature.

### **Sadhana: regularity, continuity and conviction**

The concept of sadhana has to be understood in the right perspective. Our mind is like a monkey, but more so. Just imagine a monkey that cannot sit still, and if that monkey becomes drunk, then what will happen? And, if that drunken monkey is stung by a scorpion, what then? Our mind is like a drunken monkey stung by a scorpion. It is not even just a monkey mind. We are intoxicated by our passions, desires and expectations, by our likes and dislikes. We are stung by the scorpions of life which condition our nature to identify with and experience a certain dimension of reality, and to ignore those other more subtle dimensions of reality that we are unable to identify with logically or consciously. So our viewpoint becomes very narrow. With that narrow viewpoint we begin to believe that we have an expanded awareness, that we have expanded our consciousness, that we have attained freedom. But in reality that is self-delusion.

In order to overcome this self-delusion, this is where sadhana, the practice of meditation, comes in. Sadhana has to be understood correctly. Many people say, “I have been practising meditation for many years, yet still feel I have not progressed, that I have not evolved, and I am still in the same place.” I ask them one thing, “Are you regular in your meditation?” Some say yes, some say no. Then I ask, “Do you follow one type of meditation right to the end or not?” Then they say no. One day they do a practice because it feels right that day; another day they do something else because it feels right for that day. This is the flirtatious nature of the mind.

The *Yoga Sutras* of Sage Patanjali emphasizes the point that sadhana has to be regular, continuous and done with faith. There are very clear stages: pratyahara, dharana and dhyana. Each stage and each practice has a purpose. In pratyahara, the practice of antar mouna involves observing the thoughts. You have to complete the process and reach the point where you are able to control your thoughts before moving on to the next stage. You should be able to channel, guide and express your thoughts before you move on from

antar mouna to another practice. If you want to know a practice, but find after one week it is too heady and move on to another practice, try that for another week, feel that it is not appropriate for your nature and try something else, then you are simply skimming the surface, and not diving deep into the ocean of consciousness.

Despite all the guidelines and instructions, this is where we fail. We are not able to understand the purpose of each practice. We compare everything according to our conditioned nature – this is what I need, this is what I want. But how can this untranscendental mind know what is required in order to experience something transcendental? How can a child who is learning to read and write understand the concepts of nuclear physics? We are children where our spiritual life and yoga are concerned. We are inspired by the concepts, ideas and theories, whether of the chakras, or kundalini, or kriya, or consciousness, or prana, or the koshas, or this and that. We have to be inspired, we have to be motivated, but our approach has to begin with the basic steps.

### **Alignment of head and heart**

In this age of supermarkets, yoga cannot be a product that you find in the supermarket. It should be a product that you cultivate in the field of your life according to your ability. This emotion, or bhavana, is definitely a process that can lead you to discover the harmony of all the human qualities. Once there is alignment between the head and the heart, the expression changes. When there is no harmony between the head and the heart, the actions have no aim. Therefore, the yogic traditions say that you should adhere to a path and go right to the end of the road. When you reach the end of that road, you will see a crossroad, maybe a signpost, and then you take another road.

The true yogic traditions are very firm in this belief. There is no way you can avoid or jump over the basic instincts which make up the basic nature of life. You have to go through them, you have to awaken them, experience them, channel and

harmonize them. You have to do everything that is necessary. Regularity, continuity and conviction are the important components of sadhana.

So let us try to become regular, let us try to have that inner conviction and strength which knows that behind every dark cloud there is a shining sun. Let us work on that before we attempt to indulge in ideas that are beyond our reach. Let us understand which class we are in at present, and not count the years of our involvement. Then we can be open to the receptivity, the clarity and the understanding of our mind and of our nature. This is most important.

# Kirtan as Meditation

Kirtan is a form of meditation which can take you from the intellect to the level of pranic vibration. Words stimulate one aspect of our personality. Kirtan stimulates the other aspect, so that we can experience energy in motion. Emotion is energy in motion. The whole of life, the body, the cosmos, the universe, is nothing but an expression of energy. If you were to observe your body through a high powered microscope, going through the different layers of skin, muscles and bones into the atomic structure, in the centre you would see the pulsation of the nucleus. That pulsation is energy. We are that energy. The vibrations of music and mantra help to create dynamism and activity in this energy field, and thus we are able to transform the mind.

## **Purpose of kirtan**

The purpose of kirtan is to take the mind from the gross to the subtler, more spiritual and more transcendental states. The purpose of kirtan is not just to enjoy good music. There are many forms of enjoyment. Go to a discotheque and dance, or go to a party. Why make yoga a form of enjoyment? Enjoyment binds the mind to the one experience in which you are involved. There are systems and traditions which take our human perception beyond enjoyment. Yoga is one such system.

Music can lead us to deepen our experience of yoga. Beyond enjoyment is bliss, *ananda*. Enjoyment is sensory.

Bliss is spiritual. Do we want to enjoy or do we want to experience bliss, the higher form of enjoyment? Let us look, not just for enjoyment in the things we do, but learn to harmonize ourselves with what is happening. Once we are able to find that harmony, then we experience bliss and peace. In peace and bliss there is dynamism, motion. There is the movement of bioenergy, *prana shakti*. It is not a stagnant or static experience.

When we sing, we create a force, an energy. Just as a tree is at one point and can be moved by the wind, you have to be at one point and let the energy move you. Focus yourself on what is being sung. Participate and join in. Observe what you are singing. Whether you understand it or not makes no difference. But allow one part of the mind to observe the singer – you. Allow one part of the mind to become the song, and allow one part of yourself to flow with the music and experience a different form of kirtan.

Kirtan is a vibrational experience. If you can be fully involved in the music, in the kirtan or mantra, your mindset and mental pattern will change. Your body will change. Every atom in the body will begin to sing and dance. It will be not only a feeling, not a mental experience or an emotional experience, but a vibrational experience. If you touch a live wire, the electric current will go through the whole body. Kirtan is that live wire. Hold it and allow the current to flow.

### **Dynamic meditation**

We believe that meditation is a practice or a technique in which we close our eyes, focus the mind and isolate ourselves from what is happening around us, and in that way we find peace. That is the general belief. However, there are various systems of meditation and these systems are at different dimensions and levels of our nature. Human nature is known as *swabhava*; *bhava* means expression of a feeling and *swa* means emanating from oneself. Human nature is the expression of feeling. We express our feelings in different ways and it goes without saying that this expression is intellectual,



it is through interaction. Meditation is attaining equipoise or balance in these various expressions.

Meditation is not isolating oneself, but harmonizing oneself. It is not closing the eyes and forgetting the world, but making oneself part of the world in a much more dynamic and vibrant way. That is absorption, *samadhi*, the final stage of meditation. In the beginning, however, we have to train ourselves to stop the heady nature of the mind.

When we practise pratyahara or dharana techniques, our entire focus is on the rational aspect or expression. You know for yourself that when you are beginning to meditate, your attention is diverted to the head and you become minutely aware of all the manifestations of the intellect, whether in the form of thoughts, mental impressions and images, or analysis of what is happening with the past impressions, *samskaras*, and causes, *karmas*, or analysis of the different modes of behaviour. It becomes a very heavy process. It is not possible to attain *samadhi* just by controlling the head.

### **Force of vibration**

Why did kirtan become part of meditation? The tradition says that kirtan is a meditative process. It is a meditative practice because we access another area of our nature, the area of vibration and energy. When soldiers march across a bridge, they have to break step or the vibration will cause the bridge to collapse. No matter how many tons or how many people go over the bridge at one time, it is the thumping vibration that will make the bridge fall. That is the force of vibration.

If you tune one string of a guitar or sitar and play that single string continuously, you will find that the other strings will automatically begin to vibrate although you are not touching them. Just the sound of that one string will make the others vibrate and after five or ten minutes you will find that all the strings of the sitar or guitar are vibrating in harmony. That experience can also happen to us. Just the tuning of one string will make the others vibrate in harmony. Just the merging of the conscious mind with the vibration of the kirtan and the mantra being chanted or sung will also

influence and alter the expressions of the subconscious and the unconscious. That is another form of meditation, from the intellect to vibrational levels.

Mantra chanting is also a part of the practices or *sadhana* of *swara yoga*, *nada yoga*, *mantra yoga* and *laya yoga*. *Nada yoga*, the yoga of inner sound vibration, is considered to be a meditation practice. Mantra is considered to be a meditation technique because it has the ability to captivate the attention. When the vibrational dimension or aspect of our personality is activated and union takes place between the various mental states, the mind, which is now moving in all directions, will eventually enter the state of ecstasy known as *samadhi*. *Samadhi* is that state in which bliss or inner pleasure is most active and dominant.

### **Consciousness and energy**

This reinforces the point that *kirtan* is a technique of *swara yoga*, *laya yoga*, *nada yoga* and *mantra yoga* which can help to internalize consciousness and awaken energy. According to *tantra*, the whole world is an expression of the two forces of consciousness and energy coming together. We do not understand energy. We feel that it is the vitality contained in our body and we believe it is the moving force behind the physiological, psychological and spiritual personalities. We do not understand consciousness either.

According to *tantra*, both consciousness and energy have to be united, because each one has a specific ability or perception, and this expression becomes total when they are one. Consciousness is knowledge, perception, awareness, but perception or knowledge or awareness alone cannot make energy move. It cannot make life evolve. For evolution to take place the component of energy also has to be activated, and energy that is dynamic and vibrant has no function if it is not aided by consciousness. On one side, consciousness is passive and energy is dynamic. On the other side, it is the coming together of these two forces that creates the life we experience while we are in this body, in this dimension, on this planet.

## Evolution – a circular process

We think of life as spirit entering into this body, but if spirit exists at all, it is the expression of pure consciousness and pure energy coming together in order to create something. Spirit is not different from energy. Spirit is not different from consciousness. It is the seed, the beginning of evolution. Evolution is a circular process, not a linear process. We believe it to be a linear, horizontal movement, but it is circular.

A seed evolves into a tree which bears fruit. Inside the fruit there is the same potential. The seed undergoes many transformations, but finally it gives birth to another seed. A seed will transform into roots, trunk, branches, leaves, flowers and fruit. This growth is not the end of the tree, because in its final expression it has again become a seed and when the time is right, that seed will give birth to another tree, which will again become a seed.

This is the concept of wholeness, *poornata*, as stated in the vedic upanishadic tradition. There is a peace invocation or *shanti mantra* in the upanishadic tradition, which many of you may know:

*Om poornamadah poornamidam poornaat poornamudachyate,  
Poornasya poornamaadaaya poornamevaavashishyate.*

It means: If you remove fullness from fullness, only fullness remains. If you add fullness to fullness, it is fullness. Whether you remove anything or add anything, fullness is always full. So our growth and our evolution is a circular movement. That is the wheel or vortex, the *chakra*, or the sacred circle, the *mandala*. There is a poem by William Blake,

*To see a world in a grain of sand  
And heaven in a wild flower,  
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand  
And eternity in an hour.*

## Awareness – essence of consciousness

As human beings, in order to experience this cosmic creativity affecting our life, we have only to become aware. In awareness

there is perception, cognition, understanding, wisdom and right action. Awareness is the key. Awareness is not an activity of the mind that we experience in our daily life. It is an inherent attribute of consciousness. It is the essence of consciousness, and we have to move towards realizing that consciousness, realizing the essence of that cosmic energy or prana.

That is the mantra of yoga. If awareness had no role to play in our life, we would not even talk about it. Yogis would not even mention it. We are conscious beings, so why is there so much emphasis on awareness? This awareness has to span the gross, subtle and spiritual dimensions, all three at the same time. There is awareness of the mental process, the mental thoughts and expressions and the inner emotions, as well as awareness of how we can relate to our environment and how we can use the changes and situations to experience harmony.

Not all paths are covered with flowers; there are thorns too. When we feel we are being sucked into negativity or when we feel we are moving towards positivity, at that moment we have to make an attempt to find our balance inside. Too much positivity is not good and a little negativity is not bad. A coin has two sides. Our life has two poles. Awareness helps us to follow the middle path. That is the statement of the *Chandogya Upanishad*: “Walk straight.” Walking straight is one of the most difficult lessons in life.

A reporter once asked our guru, Swami Satyananda, what psychic powers, or *siddhis*, he had. When he replied that he had no spiritual powers despite what people said, the reporter said, “But there is an aura of mystery, peace, self-control, positivism and dynamism around you. You must have some spiritual powers you are not telling us about.” He questioned Paramahamsaji at length until ultimately he said, “I have been through the dictionary of spiritual powers. Please tell me which ones you have.” Swami Satyananda said, “If I have any power or siddhi at all, it is the ability to stand on my own two feet.”

Put yourself in that situation. We would be delighted if we could read other people’s thoughts, see our future or other

people's futures, if we could fly or walk across water, and not only delighted, we would exhibit that power to prove to other people that we are superior to them. But a person who is able to find the power of harmony, who is able to discover the force of balance in life will not be happy with an exhibition of such powers. There will be no need, because the force of the self will make us independent and free.

It is that freedom and independence that we are aiming for through the practices of yoga. Therefore, when we say that life is a combination of consciousness and energy, we also have to add that the expressions of consciousness and energy can be attained through the practices of yoga. It is this realization that makes us a true human being and gives us the ability to express human qualities. Being a true human being is the greatest religion on earth.

### **Meditation for prana shakti**

Just having the label 'I am a human being' does not make one a human being. Rather, it is developing the habits of a human being to counteract the pulls of the opposing forces. What we do in meditation is to develop new habits. The first habit is learning to close our eyes, because our natural habit is to keep our eyes open. Our natural habit is to be stressed and dissipated. It is not possible to sit quietly for five minutes without moving the body, mind and emotions.

Stillness and silence in body, mind and spirit is peace. It is bliss. It is freedom and enlightenment, *moksha*, *nirvana*. It is realization. Kirtan is a meditation in itself. It is a meditation for the energies or pranas, whereas the meditation techniques of *pratyahara* and *dharana*, sense withdrawal and concentration, are meditations for the mind. Kirtan is meditation for prana. So, when you practise meditation for the mind, aid that by practising meditation on the cosmic energy or prana shakti too.

# The Role of Yoga Teachers Today

These words are addressed especially to yoga teachers and to yoga students currently undergoing teacher training. In order to understand the role of yoga teachers, first we need to define yoga. Only when we understand what yoga is can we understand our responsibilities and commitments as yoga teachers.

There is definitely a need to bring yoga into society. Why? Because we have become weak, physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually, and the social environment does not help us to regain our strength and stamina. It seems that as society progresses, the nature and personality of human beings takes steps backwards. Although everything has become more easily available, if we observe the state of our body and mind, we become acutely aware that we lack the strength and courage to find balance in life.

The air that we breathe is polluted, which affects our lungs; the food that we eat is polluted, which affects our digestion. Pollution not only affects the body, mind and emotions, it also affects the purity of the spirit. As we become more modern, we become less natural. As we move away from nature, it seems that we open the doors which allow infirmity and disease to take control. We take medication, but the chemicals weaken our body further. Sometimes I see an image of human beings crawling on the surface of the earth, unable to stand because they have become so weak that their legs no longer support the weight of their body.

This is where yoga comes in. Of course, yoga cannot remove all the impurities from the body or the environment, but it can generate and activate personal immunity so that we are able to face changing situations. When we are able to manage our diseases, illnesses and disorders, we become conscious of the process that allows us to maintain some form of balance in our life and live happily as long as we are on this planet.

### **Harnessing the subtle forces**

Yoga is not just a philosophy, but a system which can make us more disciplined, focused and centred. We lack discipline in all dimensions of our personality. Discipline means systematic expression, systematic growth and systematic participation. This is the aim and purpose of discipline. Discipline is not an imposed rule or condition; it is not forcing oneself to act and behave in a certain way. Discipline is a method by which we can express ourselves better and with greater understanding. Therefore, our first understanding of discipline begins with awareness.

The first sutra of Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* is: *Atha yoga anushasanam*. The word anushasana has been translated as discipline. However, *anu* means subtle, and *shasana* means to govern, to rule, to control and to guide, so the literal meaning of *anushasana* is being able to harness, manage, guide and direct the forces of the subtle personality. Therefore, yogic discipline is not a rigid system, but a system which allows flexibility for the mind to become conscious of itself.

By becoming conscious, by becoming aware, we are able to observe the dynamics and mechanics of the mind and body. That is anushasana. It is not only being able to observe, but also being able to express these dynamics and mechanics in a way that is natural and conducive to the growth of the stamina, strength and immunity of the body, and to the development of the mind and human psyche. This has been the purpose of yoga from time immemorial.

What is the result of anushasana or yogic discipline? Sage Patanjali has explained that you become centred

within yourself. You begin to realize your true nature. This definition of yoga is the most practical and applicable to all our conditions and situations.

### **Realize the self**

As human beings, what do we require in our life? Many people tend to rebel against a system or discipline because they see systems as being rigid and structured. However, the system we talk about in yoga is designed to guide us through the process of growth, not limit our thoughts or actions.

In life there are stresses, tensions, manipulations, obsessions and expectations which do not allow our energies to manifest in the right manner. Yoga is concerned primarily with the management of energy and mind. This leads to anushasana, which leads to realization of the self. Sage Patanjali's first three sutras indicate this process. The second sutra: *Yogaschitta vritti nirodhah*, talks of *chitta*, the mind, and *vritti*, the energy of the mind. The third sutra: *Tada drashtuh swaroope'vasthanam*, indicates the culmination of the first sutra – you realize your true nature. It is the second sutra which indicates the process by which we attain the first and third: anushasana and self-realization. So the entire process of yoga is based on mind and energy management.

Now, this mind and energy manifest through our thoughts, expressions, ideals, beliefs, values and philosophies. Philosophy is not just a lofty ideal, it determines the way human beings believe. It indicates a goal, an aspiration, something close to our nature and heart. If you believe in the capitalist philosophy, you feel it is your goal. If you believe in Marxist philosophy or in a materialistic philosophy, you feel it is close to your aspirations. If you believe in a spiritual philosophy, it is because you feel it to be close to your nature. All your expressions and efforts are guided towards the fulfilment of your philosophy. Our entire life revolves around such philosophies.

Our philosophy indicates our own nature, or *swabhava*. Philosophy is not just juggling with words, not ideas you read



in a book or scripture. It is an aspiration, an aim. Those of us who are involved with yoga believe in yogic philosophy, and it is that belief which brings us all together. If you did not believe in and feel closeness to the yogic concepts, then you would not be practising and teaching yoga. In this philosophy we find an interactive process where the body is interacting with the mind, the mind is interacting with life, and life is interacting with the spirit.

### **Combining belief with effort**

We may believe in something, in health, for example, but is that belief enough to provide us with the experience of health? A belief system has to be complemented by a practical system. We may believe in peace and we may desire peace of mind, but we have to complement that belief with an effort to attain peace. Thought and action, belief and performance, go together. One without the other has no meaning. As practitioners of yoga, as students, teachers and professors of yoga, we have to make an attempt to bring together our personal belief and our personal effort.

We have to start from a very basic level of understanding. What is the aspect or dimension of life that is interacting externally in human society? The visible part is the body. Our body is responding to the environment right now. Our body is taking nourishment right here and now, not in some other dimension, not at some other level. The conditions which exist in this dimension, which are prevalent in human society today, are not helping our body to become healthy. You may go to the gymnasium for a good workout, but what is the use if your diet is bad, if the air you breathe is bad and affects the functioning of your lungs? One hour of exercising in a gymnasium will not help to remove the pollution we accumulate over twenty-four hours. Our efforts are only superficial.

### **Taking responsibility for creating peace**

We also understand that we cannot change society or the environment, because our rulers think according to their

aspirations and beliefs. We are not here to criticize that. If we have to criticize anything, let us criticize ourselves. Why put the blame on somebody else? Why not take responsibility for what we can do for ourselves? This has always been the teaching of yoga – become responsible for yourself. We live in a chaotic world. Our mind is chaotic, our expressions are chaotic, our emotions are chaotic, so where do we find peace? Can peace replace chaos?

Peace cannot replace chaos completely and nor can chaos eradicate peace totally; they coexist together. One thing we can do is to recognize the causes of chaos, and after recognizing the causes, then try to improve the chaos in our life, not by eradicating or removing it, but by learning to live with it. The moment we learn to do that, we will be at peace with ourselves. When we do not accept something and struggle against it, we experience conflict and loss of peace. When we are able to live with it, conflict is gone and peace is established. The yogic tradition has thought about this subject for ages. It has devised techniques and methods in the form of hatha yoga, raja yoga, karma yoga, bhakti yoga and kundalini yoga, which we learn to come to a point where we are able to accept ourselves.

### **Hatha yoga releases potential**

The purpose of hatha yoga is to provide physical purity, to eliminate toxins from the body and balance the energies that become suppressed when there is toxicity in the body. If water cannot flow through a pipe, scales form inside the pipe. In the course of time, those scale formations reduce or stop the flow of water through the pipe. The same thing happens to us when we eat rich or improper food, and scales called cholesterol form in our circulatory system. There is thickening of the blood and thickening of the artery walls, and then the blood does not flow properly. That happens at the physical level. Something similar also happens at the pranic level. Just as there are arteries and veins in the body, there are also nerves and channels, *nadis*, which carry energy and stimulation to and from the brain.

Research carried out at the University of Massachusetts, USA, has found that every twenty years there is loss of memory. Why? Because the dead brain cells actually block the electrical impulses which go from one centre of the brain to another, so there is no clear route for this transmission to take place. When there is diminished transmission, we experience it physically as loss of memory. The researchers also discovered something else. If you practise the pawanmuktasana series continuously for six months, it helps to eliminate dead cells from the body. It is a scientific conclusion that if you practise the techniques of pawanmuktasana regularly for six months at the age of forty and at the age of sixty, this twenty year cycle of change is affected and your memory will remain as fresh as ever due to the process of descaling, of removing the blockages.

Have you ever looked at the pawanmuktasana series in this light? No. People think they are only practices for beginners to help prepare the body for the advanced postures, but the yogic tradition does not say this. It says we only need to practise advanced yoga postures to alter a condition of the body which has developed due to our living a particular lifestyle. If you start yoga early enough, you do not even need to practise the headstand or the lotus posture. You can practise pawanmuktasana all your life and remain forever young. There is no need to practise other yoga postures. You only need to practise other asanas in order to rectify the imbalances that affect the functioning of different organs and pranic channels. However, we think that the more complicated and difficult the postures we practise, the better yogis we will become, but it is a misconception.

You do not become better yogis by practising advanced asanas. Gymnasts are very flexible, but is that flexibility of the body really necessary? It may be a personal choice, but it is not a necessity. The necessity is for our body to be healthy, and for our mind to be calm and collected, relaxed and tranquil. That's all. Anything beyond this is a personal hobby.

## **Understanding the different yoga systems**

As teachers and practitioners of yoga, it is important to understand the role that each technique has to play in the betterment of our life. It is not necessary to become obsessed with one thing. We need to know which aspects of our body, senses, emotions, mind, nature and personality are affected by the practice of hatha yoga, raja yoga, kriya yoga, kundalini yoga and the various other yogas. But the application of these yogas has to be done properly, with wisdom and understanding.

We have to apply the practices of yoga knowing both the aim and the effects of each system and each technique. Each yoga has a specific purpose and relates to one specific aspect of our nature. Hatha yoga is for purity of the body, descaling, removing the toxins. Raja yoga is for management of the mental, psychological and emotional stresses and tensions, and to know the causes that create conflict and confusion. Kriya yoga is to awaken the subtle forces, in order to find the harmony that exists between body, mind and life. Kundalini yoga is to experience the cosmic nature of life, the transformation of consciousness and perception, the transformation of belief systems and structures, so as to allow greater fluidity in our expressions and greater wisdom in our life by awakening consciousness and energy. Bhakti yoga helps us to better understand our emotions and how we can make them more useful, constructive and creative. Karma yoga is being a witness, an observer of our actions and, by understanding our actions, developing immunity from the influences of the actions, or karmas.

## **Deal with real needs**

The responsibility of a yoga teacher is not confined only to knowing yoga. It also includes being able to understand the needs of the human personality. The more you are able to understand the requirements of each individual with whom you come into contact, the better teacher you become. But the more you try to project yourself as a person who can do all the complex postures, the more you speak of lofty

ideals, the more you are only expressing your personal arrogance. After all, if you want to sell something in the market, you provide what is demanded by the public, not what you feel the public should have. If the need is milk, then provide milk, not wine. If the need is fish, then provide fish, not grain.

Recognizing the real need is the prime responsibility of a yoga teacher and a yoga practitioner. This recognition is twofold: personal and social. We are responsible for the personal development of our students, ensuring that they attain optimum health, mental relaxation and awareness. The other dimension of this responsibility is social. What can we offer our society? If there is an addiction problem, can yoga help to manage or overcome this problem? If there is a behavioural problem, can yoga help to manage it? Formulate programs, discuss them and create a structure of teaching which can help a wide variety of needs and conditions.

Yoga teachers represent a different class of human nature, a different perspective. They have to be able to anticipate the needs of society and be ready to offer their services with clarity of mind. They should not just be jumping on the bandwagon of whatever is new. There has been enough of that. Now it is time to take up the responsibility, and that should be the *sankalpa*, the resolution, of a yoga teacher. If you have undertaken this challenge, we congratulate you and wish you success in your efforts and endeavours.

It is very clear to me why I am involved in yoga. I am involved in yoga not for personal satisfaction or gain, but because through yoga I wish to help others find health and happiness. If I felt that yoga could not provide people with health and happiness, I would be the first one to reject it. Whether you call it the influence of the Indian tradition to which I belong, or whether you call it a personal belief or a personal aspiration, I feel I have come into this life to help others find their place in life, to help others who are suffering physically, mentally, emotionally and socially. If I can help one person to be happy and healthy, I will die happily. If God gives me the opportunity and asks me, "What do you want to do?"

I will say, “Let me take birth again so I can help many more people.” I do not want enlightenment; enlightenment is for the weak. I want to struggle to make others free. That is my sankalpa, and I wish to share this sankalpa with all those who are involved with yoga. This is the inspiration I have received from yoga.

### **All societies seek health and happiness**

In any civilization or society, we have always struggled towards health. After all, modern medicine started with the discovery and use of penicillin during the second world war, not even one hundred years ago. What did we do before that to manage our health problems, our psychological and emotional problems? What systems were followed by other cultures and civilizations? Were we all pumping medicine into our bodies, or did we have a different attitude and vision of health and happiness?

Yoga represents that aspect of life where we are able to develop a different perspective. Modern medicine is emergency medicine only. If you have diabetes, you take insulin to balance the sugar level in the body, but that does not cure your diabetes. If you have hypertension, you take tablets to lower the hypertension, but it does not remove the cause of the high blood pressure. It is just suppressing those symptoms that affect our performance and functions, and by suppressing them we find we can function. But we are not able to remove the causes that created those conditions in the first place. Yoga is not an emergency treatment. It does not suppress any condition. Rather it makes us aware of the cause that has created the psychological and mental distress leading to physical disease and illness. When we complement modern medicine with the yogic practices, we can attain our balance.

As practitioners, teachers and professors of yoga, we need to understand both modern and ancient methods. We are working at that level and gradually trying to achieve this. In the western hemisphere the perception of yoga has altered dramatically since it first became popular. In the 1970s there

was a television show in England where yoga was taught as a system to trim the waistline and become beautiful physically. Later, there was another shift and yoga became a technique for managing mental and emotional stress. Then there was another shift and we saw yoga as a meditative process to get in touch with our psychic nature. Today we have come a long way from these initial efforts, because we know that yoga can be applied in different ways at different levels of society to improve health, character and behaviour.

### **Health and happiness aid yoga**

This is the right application of yoga, because only when we are healthy and mentally at peace can we experience spirituality. Spirituality is the ocean, while religion is a tributary into the ocean. Spirituality is the sum and substance of human life; religion is an expression of human belief. Spirituality in its broad sense is getting in touch with our personal nature and with our higher nature.

Spirituality is being aware of how the body and mind work in unison. We have lived with this body for many years, but we have only considered the body to be the outer packaging – the skin, muscles and bones. But the body is not just skin, muscles and bones; there are also different organs which are functioning continuously. Have you ever experienced or felt the suffering of your lungs? Have you ever felt the suffering of your stomach or liver or kidneys? Not until it reaches a critical point. Then you become aware and realize there is a major problem that you need to deal with somehow. But by then it is too late.

Awareness has to evolve uniformly through the body and through the mind. That is the teaching of yoga. Only then can we become spiritual, because spirituality is recognition of the right methods of living, thinking and behaving. Think in the right way. Behave in the right way. Act in the right way.

### **Yoga of common sense**

Of course, people will ask what is the right way and what is the wrong way. We think of something as right or wrong according

to our conditioning. The yogic understanding is that the right way – right action, right thinking, right behaviour – leads to the unfolding of the human personality, and the wrong way leads to the destruction of the human personality. In yoga, anything which can help you to destroy yourself is wrong and anything which can help you to experience health, joy and tranquillity is right.

Develop your own ideas and concepts about it, and live according to those principles you have developed. There are no table manners in yoga. The only manner to apply is common sense, and common sense is spirituality. Common sense is the right method. After all, why do we practise meditation? Only to develop common sense. We may have to entice people to practise meditation with statements like, “Kundalini will be awakened,” but it is the yoga of common sense which is relevant in our life. It was relevant in the past, it is relevant today and it will be relevant in the future.

People ask how yoga can be applicable in today’s society, how can it meet our needs when it was developed many thousands of years ago when the needs of society were different? But can you say the mentality then was different from the present, or is it only speculation based on what you read in books? If you believe in the continuity of the human mind and that there are definite patterns which repeat themselves, then it does not matter in which age you live.

When our forefathers were living in caves, the social environment might have been different. The stress factor in their lives was the appearance of lions and tigers and other such threats. Today we may think there are no tigers threatening us, but the same stress factors continue. The tiger does not come at us physically; it assumes other forms of aggression. The snake and the scorpion don’t bite us physically anymore, but they still sting us internally. We have changed, but so have the tigers and scorpions, which are the stress factors of today.

A man once came to the ashram very upset, saying that he had lost everything. His family had left him, he was destitute and no longer had any interest in living. After



expressing himself, he left. Outside the ashram gate a little girl was crying because the arm of her doll had been broken. The man approached the girl and said, “Don’t cry. You can always get another doll. Don’t cry for what has gone.” I was walking behind him and said, “Why don’t you apply the same philosophy in your life. Apply the same wisdom that you have given to this child.” That was it. Today he is living very happily.

We didn’t teach him asana, pranayama or meditation. We simply made him aware of his own common sense, and that is also yoga. Common sense is applied yoga. What we learn in classes is the practice of yoga. As yoga teachers, as yoga practitioners, learn to combine both.

# Satsang 1

## **How can we deal with anger?**

The best way to deal with anger is not to get angry. When you become angry, look at yourself and laugh at your own anger. Ask yourself why you are becoming angry. Is there any rationale or logic to it? What good does anger do? Anger is a process of self-destruction because you are the one who goes through that experience while everyone else is unaffected. So you are effectively destroying yourself. Realize that and don't get angry.

In the *Bhagavad Gita* (2:62–63), the psychology and process of mental identification is defined in beautiful terms. *Sangat sanjayate kamah kamatkrodhobhijayate* – when the mind is associated with objects, that attachment gives birth to desires and passions. *Krodhadbhavati sammohah* – when the desires and passions are not fulfilled, anger is experienced. When anger manifests, the discriminative faculty of the intellect is finished and you become *moodha*, befuddled. When the head becomes confused, the mind loses its clarity. When clarity of mind is lost, there is no wisdom and when there is no wisdom, there is no life. Life is associated with wisdom, with knowing, with realizing. This is how it is explained in the *Bhagavad Gita*.

When you ask how to deal with anger, you should understand that anger is only the expression, and that the roots of the anger belong in some other area, some other association of mind, in some desire or expectation. Then observe that.

Just sit down for a few moments and analyze why you became angry and reacted. When you know the mental association that triggered that response, then you will find peace.

**What is the purpose of pain and why do we choose it?**

If you choose pain, you are the luckiest being alive. How many people want pain in their life? Nobody, so how can you say we choose pain? We don't. All our efforts are to get out of suffering. Given the choice, we would always choose pleasure. Swami Sivananda used to say, "Nature throws a man into a crucible of pain in order to turn him into a sublime superman." Pain is an aspect of nature – growth, wear and tear, change and transformation. The first germination of the seed breaks the shell. Isn't that painful? But after pain comes pleasure.

**We know what Freudian, Jungian and new emerging trends in psychology are. Now we are hearing about yoga psychology. Could you please speak to us about this.**

In the *Yoga Sutras* of Sage Patanjali, yoga is defined in the second sutra: *Yogaschitta vritti nirodhah*. The *chitta vrittis* are modifications or movements on the surface of the mind, like waves on the surface of the ocean. This is how Sage Patanjali defined *chitta vritti* five thousand years ago. Sage Patanjali also said that the components of the mind are: *pramana* or cognition, *viparyaya* or false knowledge, *vikalpa* or confusion, *smriti* or memory, and *nidra* or sleep.

Long before psychology even considered these subjects, the yogic tradition also spoke about the different states of consciousness as: *jagrat* or the conscious mind, *swapna* or the subconscious mind, *nidra* or the unconscious mind, and *turiya* or the superconscious mind. From this understanding and from our own studies, we can say that yoga is a system of mind management, and in today's terms it is a treatise on human psychology and personality. Yoga is the original concept of the mind, and the latest discoveries in the realm of psychology only confirm the view that yoga has held for thousands of years.

### **What is yoga's role in psychotherapy and counselling?**

We opened the faculty of yoga psychology at Bihar Yoga Bharati in 1997. Using the principles of yoga psychology, on a very selective basis, we began counselling a few people who were undergoing deep emotional and psychological problems. We found that in three to four months, they were able to change their perceptions. We feel that some people need to be motivated and guided to understand and apply those principles of yoga which can help improve mental health and equanimity. We know that normal practitioners of yoga, who come to yoga classes and practise asanas, pranayamas, yoga nidra and some form of pratyahara or dharana, find that in the course of time, spontaneously, they gain the ability to manage their own states of mind. Counselling is for those who need to be guided and motivated. In Australia, yogic principles have also been utilized in psychiatry.

One point that needs mentioning is the concept of yogic sadhana. There are many yoga centres, yoga teachers and yoga masters who give different sadhanas or practices to people. These sadhanas are given with the aim of either developing spiritually, or perfecting and continuing to perfect various asanas. However, in the Satyananda Yoga tradition, Swami Satyananda would give a combination of sadhanas according to people's needs. Those who followed those sadhanas, which we could call personalized yogic prescriptions, have derived much benefit. They have not really suffered as a result of the problems they faced later in life, because they have accepted and gone through those problems without losing their sense of balance and happiness. The moment we lose our mental or psychological balance and lose contact with the experience of happiness and contentment, we face traumas in our life. Those sadhanas that Paramahamsaji gave are the greatest form of psychotherapy.

**It is said that fear is related to mooladhara chakra. We could perhaps call it the demon of mooladhara. If this is the case, what are the so-called demons in the other chakras?**

Demons exist only in the four lower chakras; there are no demons in vishuddhi chakra or above. These demons are known as instincts. There are four basic instincts: *maithuna*, sexuality, procreation, generation; *bhaya*, fear, insecurity; *ahara*, craving, desiring; and *nidra*, sleep, forgetfulness, letting go. These four instincts are related to the four lower chakras. Mooladhara is the centre for reproduction and controls sexuality. Swadhisthana, the water element, represents fear. Manipura represents desire, craving. Anahata is sleep, *nidra*.

Let us look at fear and sexuality from the perspective of mooladhara. These instincts have three expressions: sattwic, rajasic and tamasic. When *tamas* is expressing negativity, that becomes the demon and when *sattwa* is expressing, that becomes the deva. For example, if sexuality is tamasic, it is perverted, but if it is sattwic, it leads to sublimation. It is the same with desires and cravings. If the desire is for personal gratification, it can defy all logic and we become hopelessly involved in fulfilling the selfish nature. That becomes what we can call a demonic expression of desire – power, control, manipulation, not caring for other people. But if that same desire becomes sattwic, it helps one to reach out and touch other people. One is giving, not self-centred. That becomes the deva aspect.

In the system of kundalini yoga, in each chakra there is a devata and a dakini. The devata is the positive aspect and the dakini, which is the force that controls the expressions of *tamas* and *rajas*, is the demonical or negative energy. The four chakras from mooladhara to anahata are controlled and guided by a devata and a dakini.

The fifth chakra, vishuddhi, is the first centre where an attempt is made to transcend the instincts. At vishuddhi we experience purity, *shuddhata*. In vishuddhi there is purity, harmony and balance, which one experiences in all dimensions of the personality, whether sensorial, pranic or emotional, in relationships, expressions, motivations or

actions. Once you have experienced the purity of life in vishuddhi, you come to ajna, the sixth chakra, the doorway to the unified experience of life. It is the guru centre, the command centre, the portal which exists between decay and death on the one side and immortality on the other.

We need to understand the instincts in the context of the devatas, the sattwic expression of the chakras, and the dakinis, the negative expression. There is negative expression within the chakra because of our association with the senses and the sense objects. This association leads us to find our sense of comfort in the world or the environment in which we live. We all try to be comfortable. If we were all to go to the North Pole with only one warm sweater between us, there would be a stampede, with each one fighting over the sweater. Actions such as this are a result of the environment in which we find ourselves and our need to feel comfortable. Similarly, if we are hungry or starving and there is a plate of food, we will stampede. Human nature always tries to live in a shell of security, and this condition makes us lose our wisdom, our sattwic nature, which in turn makes us more self-centred and selfish.

The only way we can transcend the negative tendencies is by trying to make positive qualities of mind a habit. We do not have positive habits. All our spontaneous, instinctive expressions are negative. We don't go to school, college or university, or to an ashram, or to a guru or teacher, to learn how to express anger or jealousy or hatred, but we do ask the masters and teachers how we can learn to love. We do not ask how to learn to hate or dislike, but we need to ask how to learn to be compassionate. If you think about it, the natural expressions of the human personality are negative. For example, smoking becomes a habit and it is hard to give it up. There are labels, big and small, saying, 'Smoking is injurious to your health'. There is scientific evidence to prove that lung cancer is the outcome of smoking. Despite knowing this, people are still unable to get rid of the habit.

Our mind functions because of habits. Why should we try to change a bad habit, or worry about getting rid of a

habit? The approach should be how to develop a positive habit. If you smoke, smoke! Don't worry about it. If you hate, hate! Don't worry about it. But at the same time try to develop a positive habit which compensates for the negative expression of your personality. You will find that the demons will disappear once you are able to develop positive habits and the nature of divinity expresses itself.

### **What is the difference between self and ego?**

There is no difference between self and ego; they are one and the same. Maybe there is a difference in the English usage, but when we refer back to the original Sanskrit, *akara* means the form of the self, and *aham* means individuality, the ego. In yogic terminology, we use the word *ahamkara* to indicate the ego, which is the totality of our life and personality, and also to indicate the individual self. The negative expression is the negative ego and the positive expression is the positive ego. If you dislike somebody for some reason, who is doing the disliking? This implies the question "Who am I?" and although people may feel it is a philosophical question needing a philosophical answer, it is not a philosophical question, but represents a search for one's true identity. Who am I? What am I?

These questions lead to intensification of awareness of our actions, attitudes and behaviour, so that when we find a slight deviation from the normal state of equilibrium, then an adjustment has to be made. This adjustment is the role of yoga, finding the middle path. This concept of the middle path is not the Buddhist concept, but the way of what we call an enlightened being, a person who is not swayed by the forces that pull you either to the left or to the right. When those forces pull you, you fall, but when you are unaffected by those forces, you can walk upright.

### **Can the ego exist in the psychic realm?**

It does exist. Life cannot exist without ego, or *ahamkara* in yogic terminology, and psychic experience is part and parcel of life. We should not think of ego as pertaining to our external

expressions only. Ego is the life that we are living. *Akara* is the form and *aham* is the personal identity, the 'I-ness'. When this personal identity is associated with the gross nature, when it is manipulated by the sensorial, sensual external behaviour, then this 'I-ness' takes a different form. But when this ego, this 'I', is affected by the state of peace, then it loses what is known as its external vritti and in this dimension of life you also experience peace.

The ego exists in all dimensions as a force which can bring you down to the depths of hell and also take you beyond heaven into a state where there is the experience of eternity. This is the aim of *ahamkara*. The final dissolution of the self is the removal of *akara*, the form. Life is then experienced not only within our physical frame, but we become the star child. Remember the movie '2001: A Space Odyssey'. The body is lost, but the mind takes birth as the star child. The ego, the identity of the senses is dissolved, the identity of the cosmic nature is experienced and we merge with that.

### **How can we change negative qualities into more positive qualities?**

When you read a book, you start from page one and as you read the chapters, you see the story unfolding and evolving. As you read a chapter, you don't tear it out and throw it away. You leave it there and simply keep turning the pages. Similarly, life is a book. Why are you worrying about eradicating or tearing out an aspect of your personality and throwing it in the fire? You should concern yourself with turning the pages. There is no eradication; there is a continuous transformation, known as evolution. Mind, life and energy are continually evolving. Consciousness, *Brahman*, the supreme spirit, *paramatman*, are evolving. In yoga, we do not have the concept of God; we speak only about Brahman, the evolving principle.

The second point to consider is the chakras: *mooladhara*, the earth element, controlling sexuality; *swadhisthana*, the water element, controlling fear; *manipura*, the fire element,



controlling desire and cravings; anahata, the air element, controlling passivity and escape; and vishuddhi, space. Where does growth take place in the world? Everything evolves in space because space contains the other elements. You put up a marquee, you plant a seed, you construct a house – it all grows in space. There is the vedic statement, ‘Aham Brahmasmi’. *Ham* is space and *Brahman* is the process of evolution of consciousness. Space has been defined as consciousness, as the cosmic, transcendental nature, because it is in space that everything grows. If you remove space, there will be no growth. Nothing can be done with just the other four elements because the space element contains the other tattwas. There is no earth, water, fire or air if space does not exist.

The third point to consider is the colours. In order to print a photograph, you scan it in different colours, and when you superimpose those colours on top of one another, you can see the image clearly. But if you have a scanner that can scan only one colour, the image will not be a true reflection of the original item. Similarly, there are three types of personalities: the lower personality represented by the *patalas*, the intermediate personality represented by the *chakras* and the higher personality represented by the *lokas*. When we put these three together, we become what we are. If we remove one, we cease to exist. To put it another way, the *patalas*, the *chakras* and the *lokas* are like the three scans of life. They are the three primary colours of life and when they combine, they interact with each other and make a human being.

Symbolically, these centres are represented as lying on a vertical plane, one on top of another: the *patalas*, the seven lower centres, the *chakras*, the seven intermediate centres, and the *lokas*, the seven higher centres. But if we look at it from the yogic perspective, the *patalas*, *chakras* and *lokas* are parallel to each other. The lowest of the *patalas*, the tamasic quality, is connected to the lowest of the *chakras*, the rajasic quality, which is connected to the lowest of the *lokas*, the sattwic quality. The same thing takes place one

step up with the next group; above that, the third group; above that, the fourth group and so on. Imagine there are three plates, each connected with seven threads, so if you are in the lowest patala or chakra or loka, the influence of the other two is also there. For example, when you are in mooladhara chakra, you are being influenced by the lowest patala and lowest loka as well. Even when you come up to sahasrara, there is also the influence of the highest patala as well as satya loka, the highest loka.

## Satsang 2

### **Can one train or prepare the mind of a child in the womb?**

It happens all the time. We have to remember that the body is provided by the father, but the mind is provided by the mother. This includes the samskaras, the habits of mind that the child begins to imbibe when the soul enters the womb at about the twentieth week. There are cases where we have experimented by providing the right environment for the child in the womb, and these children have definitely proved to be different from so-called normal children. It is an area which needs further investigation and we need to deepen our awareness of the possibilities.

Prakriti or shakti, energy, can only evolve when it can nurture, which means that femininity is the source of personal transformation. Masculinity and femininity represent two opposite poles, both complementing each other. Masculinity by itself is rigid, aggressive and dominant, whereas femininity represents the psychic, soft, nurturing and caring personality. If we want to find our centre, we need to nurture our femininity – that goes for men too.

The idea of how to develop that dimension of our nature where we come in touch with the soft and subtle aspect of life and creation has been conveyed in many ways by different people in different traditions. In fact, it is stated in the tantras that the connection developed with a child right from conception is the key to unlocking the doors of

consciousness. It helps to create a connection with the soft nature of human personality.

**My children are my biggest teacher and challenge. I feel I fail them miserably. Can you give me any guidance?**

We have all failed them because we have forgotten how to live like children. There is a saying, “In order to enter the kingdom of heaven, you have to become like a child.” We have lost that quality and we also believe that children know less than we do. Rather than being their friends, we become their judge, jury and executioner, and this is the cause of the generation gap. Don’t just be a parent, but be a friend and you will find that both of you can learn a great deal from each other. Be a good friend to your child.

**What is the role of awareness in achieving inner silence?**

Can anything be attained in life without awareness? Can we become aware of silence or aware of sounds without awareness? Awareness is the main body in which both silence and sound are understood. If the component of awareness is removed, there is no life. We are dead without awareness.

In the *Yoga Sutras*, to achieve inner silence, apart from the techniques of pratyahara and dharana, Sage Patanjali simply says to focus on one thing; for example, by becoming the breath, not just by observing the breath, you become what you experience. If you want to experience the wind blowing against your body, transcend body awareness and become the wind. If you want to experience silence, become the silence. It is an effort, but an effort that generates deeper awareness and perception.

**If one hour of yoga nidra equals four hours of sleep, is it possible to bypass sleep completely?**

One need is for relaxation, the other is for sleep. They are two different things. Sleep is the total shutdown of the physical mechanism or the conscious mechanism that controls the physical senses. Sleep is necessary for one hour, two hours, eight hours, twelve hours; it is important for the body. Of

course, deep relaxation can reduce the need for sleep, as recognized in yoga when we say that one hour of yoga nidra is equal to four hours of normal sleep, but we cannot replace sleep. You can practise yoga nidra for three or four hours and have a relaxation that equals twelve hours of sleep, but in order to relax the *indriyas*, the senses, the minimum sleep requirement is three hours. So sleep for three hours and the rest of the time practise yoga nidra.

**Is it dangerous to introduce yoga nidra to prisoners because of their confined lifestyle?**

When Swami Satyananda went to Chicago in 1968, during his first world tour, he was called to a prison to give yoga lessons to the inmates. However, he found it was impossible to conduct a yoga class there. The inmates spent the whole one hour class hooting and jeering. Then the chief inmate, the boss of the group, came up to him and said, "Hey Swamiji, have a cigarette." Paramahamsaji said to him, "I will have one, but first do what I am asking you. Get everyone to lie down. I am going to make you sleep." He gave them a ten minute yoga nidra, everyone went to sleep and Swamiji left. Next day, he called the prison authorities to say, "Look, it is impossible to give any yoga classes to these people. I am not coming again." The warden said, "No, you have to come back. Since you left everyone has been very quiet and they all want you to teach them the same thing you taught them yesterday."

For one week Paramahamsaji went to the prison every day just to give the inmates lessons in yoga nidra. When he was leaving after the last class, he called the chief inmate and said, "Thank you for keeping your promise, now I will keep mine. Give me a cigarette." The chief inmate said, "I am sorry, please excuse me." There was a total change. So definitely, yoga nidra with specific visualizations not only helps prisoners to relax, but can also alter their behaviour and expressions.

This has been our experience in India too. At the request of the Bihar government, for the last five years we have been

teaching yoga in twenty-four state prisons. We have trained three hundred lifers as yoga teachers. We asked the prison authorities to allow the lifers to go to front line prisons as yoga teachers and the prison authorities accepted that proposal. More than asana or pranayama, yoga nidra is a big hit, because during the day, when the inmates are involved in prison activities and interacting with others around them, where there are threats and aggression, they feel that yoga nidra helps them to become more centred and peaceful, and to release their aggression in a more positive way. In a psychological profile taken over several months, prisoners reported dramatic changes in attitudes and perceptions about feelings of revenge, guilt and aggression, and positive changes in the quality of sleep, eating habits and overall health.

**It has been said that there comes a time when one needs to make adjustments in lifestyle, and that this is when sannyasa comes in. Should a sannyasin spend some time in an ashram to undergo training?**

If you want a degree, you have to go to a university. If you want to fill your stomach, you have to go to the kitchen or to a restaurant. You have to go to the place where the need can be fulfilled. If you want to change your lifestyle, go to a place where some guidelines can be provided.

We are all very proud of this brain of ours, because it has lots of possibilities and we feel it fully understands. It can understand, but it has to be trained and educated, otherwise it will not be receptive or able to understand. If we live in a stressful environment and we want to learn how to release that stress, we have to move to another environment. If we are living a lifestyle which is not satisfying, we have to re-educate ourselves and learn how to change the lifestyle so it is more satisfying.

For many years we live a particular lifestyle. Then a desire for change comes. It indicates, not that we are going to learn something new, but that we are bored with what we have been doing. If we were not dissatisfied, the desire

would not arise. Human nature always seeks satisfaction and contentment. This is the saving grace of our life. This desire is the motivating force that makes us look around and say, “Okay, I will attempt that, I will try that and maybe I will feel better, healthier and happier.”

When trying something new, we have to educate ourselves and change our habits. In sannyasa it has been stated very clearly that traditionally one has to live for twelve years with the guru in the ashram. Today people want shortcuts, so they make it twelve days, but make it at least twelve months so that you are able to absorb the concept of adjustment, of fine-tuning the personality. Therefore, it is important to spend some time in the presence of a guru in an ashram environment. After some time, once you know what dials you need to turn to tune your frequency, then you can leave and try out what you have learned.

**Please describe the guru and disciple relationship.**

Whether it is guru and disciple, husband and wife, parent and child, teacher and student, the principles are the same. The only difference is the obsessive aspect of mind. Obsession can take different forms. Observing our obsessions and managing them is the teaching that the guru gives us. Obsessions can take the form of a belief, a desire, a feeling or a thought. The guru teaches us how we can manage the obsessions which manifest in different areas of our life at different times. Once we are able to manage our obsessions at these different levels, then we begin to rise in whatever we do. When two people are in love, we say they are falling in love. Why do we say ‘falling’ in love? The concept of falling is downwards. We never say ‘rising’ in love. Mundane relationships fall in love, but the guru-disciple relationship always rises in love.

Another aspect of the relationship is trust. Trust arises out of understanding the ultimate aim that you will eventually attain by following the path. When you ask a policeman standing on the corner for directions, you have to trust him when he says, “Go this way, that way, left, right, left,

and there you are.” If you distrust him, will you follow his directions? Often this trust is clouded by our ambitions and covered by our expectations, and doubts arise: “Am I doing the right thing?” “Am I on the right path?” “Am I with the right person?” “Am I in the right place?” The moment there is doubt, trust is gone. Doubt comes because we are unable to keep our inspiration alive.

When we start something new, there is optimism. When we have been in that environment for some time, the drive, optimism and motivation is lost and our self-perceptions take over. That is one of the reasons why the guru-disciple relationship, although it is spoken about, is rarely experienced. Can I consider myself a disciple of my guru? Externally yes, but internally do I have that feeling, faith, conviction and awareness, no matter what happens?

Do you know the song, “There’s a new world somewhere, they call the promised land, and we’ll be there some day if you will hold my hand . . .” When we are able to express such sentiments, we are feeling the need, but when we are on the journey, we disconnect from the original need which brought us to this path. That is why, although we talk about this relationship, it is very difficult to maintain. Maintaining that clear vision is the biggest challenge in the life of a student or a disciple.



## Satsang 3

**In emotional situations which call for personal investment, I experience a feeling of coldness, of not being sensitive, of complete indifference. I would like to know what to do because I feel that I have a block of ice inside which I cannot break.**

The twentieth century was the century of the intelligence quotient, IQ, and the twenty-first century will be the century of the emotional quotient, EQ. This will be a very important step in the development of human beings. Just as we have been able to develop our intelligence to perceive the world rationally, in the same way we will need to develop our emotional quotient to perceive the inner world. This is a subject which psychologists, psychoanalysts and even yogis are going to investigate in this century. In fact, we have begun this trend with the practices of hridayakasha dharana.

Intellectual abilities have certain limitations. They cannot tell us the way to attain emotional harmony. Everyone in this world is disturbed by emotions. To find a balance we need to be in control of the emotions, but being in control does not mean that we block them and wear a stony face. Rather it is an understanding of how the emotions work and how we can channel them for the best result.

In human beings negative expressions are natural. For example, we do not have to learn how to be jealous or angry, how to hate and dislike; but we have to be taught how to be happy, compassionate, joyful, loving and kind. The

negative aspects of life manifest spontaneously, but one has to make a great effort to express the positive qualities. This is a natural emotional imbalance in everyone. So when we speak of attaining emotional harmony or greater emotional expression or control, we have to find a balance between the negative and positive emotions. There is no harm in disliking or hating something or even becoming jealous, but it should not become compulsive or obsessive.

A balance between the tamasic and rajasic emotions can be found through the practices of dharana. In the raja yoga system, dharana in the sixth step: yama, niyama asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi. In the system of dharana meditations, there is a specific meditation to become aware of the emotional space within. Vyoma panchaka dharana, meditation on the five subtle spaces, is a way of connecting with the emotional dimension that exists in every personality, and it has five different stages. If we are trying to develop positive emotions, there will always be some struggle as we try to develop them along with the existing negative ones. But by becoming aware of the emotional dimension inside, we can directly access the positive emotions, thus making them part of our lives. This is the aim.

People who have practised the five stages of this dharana meditation have been greatly helped, because ultimately the way to improve the expressions of one's self externally is through meditation. The way to improve oneself internally is also through meditation. Meditation represents a heightened state of mental and emotional awareness.

**Why doesn't yoga free us from fears and problems? After years of practising, the same difficulties persist. The internal dialogue is permanent. How is it possible to stop the mental activity? If it is impossible, can we use it in a positive way?**

The continuous internal dialogue is an attempt to intellectualize or understand rationally what is happening within us. We want everything to fit in the compartments of our understanding according to our perceptions. But that is only

intellectual. What about the other aspects in our life that need to be understood? It is not possible to rationalize them because they represent different expressions of our personality. Therefore, these expressions have to be seen in different ways so that we can attain inner harmony. The internal dialogue represents an intellectual or rational process. As you go deeper into the source of your being there will come a time when you will have to ignore this dialogue, and that will happen when you learn how to flow.

You ask why yoga does not liberate you from your problems. Why should yoga liberate you from your problems? Yoga provides you with the ability to confront problems. Once you have those abilities, changing the situation is an expression of your strength. It is like being down a well and expecting the rope to pull you out of the well. There is a rope, but you have to use it. This is what you need to become aware of. Yoga will give you the means and the inspiration, and then you must use your strength to overcome the problem.

**How does mantra work on the mind? In sadhana how is it possible not to fall into mechanical practice? Is it possible to maintain a yogic attitude in daily life without regular yoga practice? How can I find my path?**

The mind is not matter, it is energy which is vibrating. The physical body is composed of matter, but the internal being is composed of energy. External sound vibrations alter the structure of the energy within. If I say something nice to you, it will alter your frame of mind and if I say something unpleasant, it will affect you. Why? Words affect us because they carry a vibration.

There are three types of vibration: those which influence you positively, those which influence you negatively and those which influence you spiritually. Positive and negative influences happen in the dimension of mind, but the spiritual influence happens beyond the mind. Once we begin to repeat a mantra, it creates harmony in the vibratory being, pranamaya kosha. Yoga sees the human personality as composed of five bodies or *koshas*. *Annamaya kosha* is the body

of matter, the senses, it is the only material body. *Pranamaya kosha* is the body of energy that is manifesting in the form of physical vitality, mental alertness and life. *Manomaya kosha* is the mental body, the subtle aspect of energy manifesting in the form of thoughts, emotions and feelings. Then comes *vijnanamaya kosha*, the intuitive nature, encompassing the entire range of conscious and unconscious experiences. *Anandamaya kosha* is the fifth body, representing bliss and fulfilment, the body of wholeness.

The words of a language affect manomaya, pranamaya and annamaya koshas, the mental, pranic and physical dimensions. Mantras influence vijnanamaya and anandamaya koshas, the intuitive and blissful dimensions. So mantra works not at the level of the mind, but at the level of the deeper mind. Once the experience of harmony begins at deeper levels of consciousness, it percolates down to the other levels.

Mechanical practice is necessary in the beginning. We do not treat the personality as if it is made of iron. If you want to give shape to iron, you hit it once with a twenty- pound hammer, but we treat the human personality as if it were made of gold. You give shape to gold with little taps of a light hammer and continue tapping to create a shape. You have to adopt the same approach to practising yoga. In the beginning it may seem mechanical. But the yoga practices are not mechanical because they carry the component of awareness, and this awareness deepens each time you practise yoga. If there is no awareness associated with yoga practice, then it becomes a purely mechanical process.

There are two types of awareness: one is where you are consciously focusing on what is happening and the other is the natural participation of your awareness in the practice. When you are learning to drive, you have to consciously focus on managing the gears, steering wheel, brakes, clutch and accelerator. But when you have learnt how to drive, you do not have to focus consciously at all because it all happens spontaneously. In that spontaneous activity, there is awareness. The moment you lose awareness in spontaneous activity, there will be a crash. It is that spontaneous awareness which

becomes part of yoga practice. You do not always have to use your will to bring your awareness to the practice you are doing. Rather it becomes part of the process and therefore it is not mechanical.

Once this becomes a natural process, then you do not even need to practise yoga, because yoga stops being a practice and becomes part of life. If you want to practise yoga, you will prepare a space in a room. In yoga we teach you to also prepare the place inside the mind. To practise yoga you have to make a space in your room, but to experience yoga you have to make a place in your mind.

There comes a time when you do not need to prepare because it is natural and spontaneous. Generally we relate yoga to physical participation, but ultimately it is the inner participation that is more important. For that you need to have a very clear cut perception and desire, known as sankalpa. *Sankalpa* is focused will, a positive thought. The sankalpa you make in yoga nidra, for example, is a focus created for your mind in order to achieve a result. Sometimes the question arises, “Is this the right one for me?” But when we are trying to focus the mind, confusion should not arise.

We live in the physical dimension, the mental dimension, the emotional dimension and the spiritual dimension. We live in the social dimension, in the dimension of desires and activities to attain those desires. Let us take up one thing at a time and focus at that point. Let us analyze what we require in the present moment. If our requirement is physical, then our focus should be on the physical and our sankalpa becomes physical. After attaining the physical we are free to change our sankalpa to something else. Then another analysis begins. Is our need emotional, social, financial or spiritual? Then we focus on that. If we have too many choices, the mind becomes a supermarket. We have a supermarket outside and a supermarket inside. There are so many things to choose from outside and so many things to choose from inside. Out of all the choices, you have to pick one. That is sankalpa.

**What is the meaning of guru's grace? Why it is said that one can be liberated only by the grace of the guru?**

Grace is the outcome of the connection between two people, just as love, empathy and closeness are the outcome of the connection between two people. In spiritual life, when we go on a journey of self-discovery, when we have to transform or transcend the limiting nature of the personality, we do not do it alone, but with the help of some other force. If we have to travel from one country to another, we do not do it entirely alone, but rely on some mode of transport, such as an aeroplane or a train or a car. Similarly, what we term as grace is the outcome of the connection, understanding, love, trust or faith that one person places in another person.

When I sincerely place my faith and trust in God, I wholeheartedly believe that in times of trouble I shall be guided. Because of that faith and conviction, in difficult times I am able to find a solution which helps to tide me over the problem in a gentle and smooth way. I attribute that to divine grace, to the connection with God that is felt very deeply. God became my guide, God became my friend, God became my philosopher, God became my support, encouragement and strength. When I am able to give this much to God, then I become the recipient of God's grace. It is the reciprocation of God's feelings towards me.

It is the same with the guru. You come to someone believing that this person will help you, so there is an intellectual or emotional or maybe even a spiritual connection right from the beginning. Then you develop that connection. This connection does not remain only external, it becomes deeper and deeper. You begin to love your guru and your guru begins to love you. You begin to place your faith and trust in the guru, and the guru begins to place his trust and faith in you. Whatever you give one hundred percent, you receive one hundred percent. That intimate connection is the grace. So grace is never one-sided. This is my experience, because when I reflect on my relationship with my guru, I can frankly say that I can definitely feel his love every moment of the day. I can feel his connection

with me. I am sure it is also vice versa, that wherever he is, he is also able to experience my deep connection and deep feelings for him.

When the love and faith are shared in equal intensity, then the combination becomes grace. It is this connection and relationship that becomes the force of inspiration, support and motivation. When you are in deep states of sadhana, in an unknown, uncharted dimension of consciousness and don't know what to do, suddenly guidance comes. You are guided because this connection does not recognize distances and boundaries. Rather that force becomes alive within you and you exist within that force.

In order to explain this *sambandh*, this relationship, the term God's grace or guru's grace is used. But analyzing it in relation to one's feelings, one's affection, one's thoughts, one's mind and one's life, it can be seen as a reciprocal arrangement; what you give is what you receive. So there is no use thinking, "I will get guru's grace," or "I will get divine grace, God will help me." It is not going to happen like that. What can happen is that you give yourself first and then that other force will manifest in you. Therefore, it is also said that grace does not appear until and unless you surrender totally and there is a complete letting go of the inhibitions, complexes and identities that bind us to this realm.

If you want to experience how fire burns, throw something in it, but remember that once you do, you will not get it back in the same form. If you throw a piece of paper in the fire, all you will get back are the ashes. Throw yourself in the fire. You won't come back with this body; you will be burnt and the fire within the body will become alive. Similarly, with grace, give love, submerge yourself in it, and you will receive something back. Give faith and trust, submerge yourself in it, and you will get something back. Grace is what you are able to give and what you are able to receive. That is my own understanding and experience in this journey of sannyasa.

### **Please explain Shanti Path**

*Shanti Path* means chant of peace. This chant of peace is divided into two parts. The first part is a personal affirmation: “Lead me from the unreal to the real, lead me from darkness to light, lead me from death to immortality.” The second part is a resolution for global improvement and evolution: “Let there be positivity everywhere, let there be peace everywhere, let there be wholeness everywhere, let there be auspiciousness everywhere.”

We always do this chant of peace at the end of a program because it helps us to connect with the spirit of yoga; from the microcosmic awareness going out to the macrocosmic awareness, from individual perceptions to global, universal perceptions, from individual affirmations to global resolutions.





# The Yoga of Sri Krishna

J.J. School of Arts, Mumbai, India  
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# Educating the Inner Self

## Practical Aspects of the Bhagavad Gita (Part 1)

Sri Krishna played many roles in his life, but we will begin with his character as a yogi. We will look at him not as an incarnation of divinity, but as a man who lived yoga and who, on the strength of his knowledge of yoga, created a new personality and envisioned a new kind of society. This man is known as Yogeshwara. Two words are contained within the word Yogeshwara – yoga and ishvara. Yoga takes us to Ishwara, or Godhood. Our life is subject to decay, *nashwara*, but the reality of life is Ishwara, that which does not decay. *Nashwara* means mortal, changeable. *Ishwara* means immortal, changeless, undecayable. The word Yogeshwara is not a title, rather it defines the entire sequence of yoga.

### **Yoga for ordinary people**

Let us begin by understanding what yoga is. Those who have studied Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* will say that yoga is a system, a set of practices to improve the quality of the mind through personal discipline and restraint of the modifications of the mind – *Yogaschitta vritti nirodhah*. This transformation of the self leads to the experience of the eternal principle in life, which is the *atma*, the spirit. The *atma* is the foundation, the root of life. Once you are linked with the root of life, the positive qualities, *satgunas*, begin to manifest. It is the *satgunas* that make a man into a superman.

In ancient times, it was said that we should try to connect with the light that is within us – *atma deepo bhava*. The method

to join with this inner light is *yoga sadhana*. The literal meaning of *yoga* is 'union'. For us that implies the union of our external and internal nature, not union between the individual soul and the cosmic soul, which is a philosophical concept. Maybe this philosophy can become a reality for some people who have the ability to experience the existence of the spirit and of divinity, but such people are rare. So we will not discuss *yoga* in terms of the union of the individual soul with the higher soul, because we are ordinary people. We have our own nature, our own phobias, complexes, attitudes and behaviour, and these make up the quality of our lives.

Our outlook on life, our nature, experiences, cultural input and education are all different. We are all individual units with our own set of values. We share very few qualities universally. We can aspire to share some qualities and we can make an effort to develop good qualities, but whatever we experience and develop will be expressed according to the programming of our mind, society, culture, religion and family tradition. Even peace or bliss or realization can have different meanings for different people. The only thing everyone has in common is the desire for peace or bliss, but the expression and experience of peace and bliss is different for each individual.

Spiritual education is not academic education, where everything is uniform and where you pass from one class to the next. Spiritual education is a uniquely individual education. Although there is one goal, there are different processes and, therefore, *yoga* has a different meaning for everyone who practises it, depending on the environment and situation. Ultimately, if we begin to think of *yoga* as a process of personal transformation, as a method to develop the consciousness and awaken the dormant energy, then *yoga* becomes a practice, not a philosophy.

Just as each bead of a mala is independent but linked together by a thread, the religions and philosophies of the past, present, and possibly of the future, each have their own uniqueness. But when it comes to practice, when it comes to the actual purification of the nature and mentality through

sublimation of the mind, the common path adopted will be meditation, asana and pranayama, mantra and japa, kriyas and kundalini yoga. Yoga links these various philosophies and religions by becoming the common thread of practice.

### **Sanyam – balanced attitude**

Yoga has to be understood in this light, not as a part of *tapasya*, austerity, not as a sadhana leading to *moksha*, liberation, but as a practice which transforms the human personality. The outcome of that transformation can be expressed either in your intellect as a jnani, through feelings as a bhakta, or through your actions as a karma yogi. We have to begin the process of yoga by recognizing where we are at present and what we lack in our lives.

We do not need peace or prosperity or happiness. All we require is sanyam. The word sanyam is loosely translated as restraint of the body, mind and emotions, but it means something different. *Sam* means 'balance' and *yam* means 'attitude'. *Sanyam* is therefore a balanced attitude to life. A balanced attitude is the beginning of personal transformation. We know that we are not balanced. Sometimes our nature is pulled towards pleasure and sometimes towards pain, always influenced by happiness and sadness, positive and negative. Like a pendulum, we swing from one pole of life to the other. In yoga, this swing of the pendulum is *raga* and *dvesha*, identification and non-identification, acceptance and rejection. When we accept something, we are *sukhi*, happy, and when we reject something, we are *dukhi*, unhappy. This is the swing. When we are on the positive side, our attitudes and feelings go up. When we are sad and in pain and suffer, our attitudes and values again change.

A balanced attitude can be maintained by guiding and directing the activities of the mind, because the mind is the experiencer, the enjoyer. It has been stated in the Upanishads that you are the actor, *karta*, the doer, and *bhokta*, the enjoyer. From good actions you have good experiences and from bad actions you have bad experiences. So, the *karma*, the action, can be positive or negative, uplifting or restricting,

selfish or selfless. The outcome of the action will be similar to the action.

If our actions are bad, the outcome will be negative. How then can we experience *shanti*, peace? Insecurity and fear will always be associated with bad actions. You can justify the actions through logic, but that is not enough. You can rationalize and say, “I am going to harm that person for these reasons,” but the fact is that you are performing a negative action, and that negative action will destroy your mental peace, health and happiness. Therefore, yoga says, “Learn to manage the mind and find equilibrium. Develop a balanced attitude.”

This balanced attitude or approach is *sanyam*, and that is our primary requirement, not peace. A person who has attained *sanyam*, balance in attitude, in action, in thoughts and in the realm of emotions is defined as a *yogi*.

### **Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram**

It has been stated in the *Bhagavad Gita* (2:48): *Samatvam yoga uchyate* – equilibrium is the highest yoga. A person who has equipoise, who is centred and balanced, is a *yogi*, and gains the ability to rise beyond the influences of duality, of good and bad, pleasure and pain, happiness and sadness. Once you are able to rise above duality, you begin to experience three constant factors in your life: God is *Satyam*, truth, God is *Shivam*, auspiciousness, and God is *Sundaram*, beauty.

When you begin to experience *satya*, there is absence of duality, realization of truth and non-identification with the false, due to association with the real thing. Then the process of developing awareness of *ishwara tattwa* begins. *Ishwara tattwa* is the non-changing, constant reality that governs the entire existence, the entire creation of which we are an expression. This is the concept of *Yogeshwara*. Through control of the mind, by attaining restraint of the body, senses and emotions, by transforming the actions, by developing and maintaining a balanced, harmonious, uplifting attitude, we realize the true nature of the self and attain *Yogeshwara*.

## **Sri Krishna, the man**

Sri Krishna was Yogeshwara. You are well versed with the events of his life, the tragedy and turmoil he had to go through. In fact, he was at the top of Kansa's 'hit list' many years before he was even born. Due to a prophecy, he was targeted for death and destruction and many attempts were made on his life. Yet he survived because of his unique personality and because of his destiny and karma. Here we are not talking of Sri Krishna as an incarnation of God, but as an ordinary person who achieved and contributed something invaluable through his example, inspiring us to grow and to tread the path of dharma.

From the time of his birth he was a target, but destiny willed otherwise. Whether you call it destiny or God's will, it is one and the same thing. Just as you are not aware of what God's will is, you are not aware of what human destiny is. Yet it unfolds in our life as time passes, and later, when we are nearing the end of our lives, we realize that we have lived according to our destiny and not according to our own desires.

The boundaries for our expression in life are created by destiny. How you are able to express yourself within the boundaries of destiny is your *purushartha*, your effort, your choice, your desire, your environment. But the boundaries are set by destiny and you live according to that. People often ask, "What is the role of human effort and destiny?" When you move into a new flat, it is ready-made. You can only make minor changes to the flat, and that is your *purushartha*, your personal effort. You cannot change the entire structure of the flat and make something different; you have to live within the existing structure. The flat is your destiny, the interior decorating is your *purushartha*. There is personal effort, the desire to change, to attain, to become something, but it all happens within the framework of destiny.

## **Educating the inner self**

Sri Krishna internalized yoga as a child when he was living in the presence of his guru. His guru gave him an education, the basis of which was yoga. The structure of our educational



system today is related to the intellect. However, in earlier times, the education the guru gave his disciples was not merely intellect related, it was related to the expression of the inner self, the atma. The expression of that inner self could then be seen in their thinking, behaviour and associations in society. This education was also connected to the emotions, because emotional tenderness is a necessity for all of us in order to make our behaviour more generous and expansive.

Action is also our requirement, because it is through the medium of action that we can move ahead in society and life. So behaviour, intellect, emotion and action are the four aspects of the education of the inner self or atma. When we receive such an education, it influences not just the intellect but the entire personality.

Today, modern people receive intellectual education, but they are not taught how to bring that education into their behaviour. How to express the feeling of generosity, for example, is not taught. In fact, it is said that generosity is a weakness in practical life, a hurdle in the path of name, fame and prosperity. If you want material success, you must become a part of the competitive rat race and not bother about other people. What we receive in modern education are the values of selfishness and personal gain.

The education we receive in the company of the guru incorporates the values of *paramartha*, selfless action. This is the education that Krishna received and internalized in his lifetime. This education enhanced his personality, made him more generous, wise, active and balanced. He had an integrated personality, not a divided personality. In today's society we suffer from a split personality. We put on different kinds of masks in order to project ourselves in a different light. But a person who has perfected yoga and who is able to integrate the major factors of their personality does not need to put on different masks. This you can see in the life of Krishna. He had a mischievous nature, but there was wisdom in his mischief, not ignorance. There was both sanyam and wisdom, the result of sadhana.

## **Natural living**

When Krishna went to live in his guru's ashram, he was already a prince. After destroying Kansa he had installed his grandfather on the throne of Mathura and had taken his rightful place as prince of Mathura. He then went to receive education in the gurukul where he lived like an ordinary person, without demands. We do not have the ability to live without making demands. It is our habit. If there are no comforts provided, we leave the hotel or move house. If our husband or wife is not to our liking, we change them. We always have expectations that everything that happens should be according to our demands.

Spiritual life does not oppose happiness, but says that we should live according to the situation. If you are offered bread, accept it. Whatever situation you are confronted with, you must accept it and live and behave in accordance with the requirements of that situation. This is called natural living. A natural life does not mean that you must sacrifice wealth and luxury, live under a tree and wear clothes made of leaves. It means adjusting to the environment in which you live, to your present situation, without imposing your desires, expectations and concept of comfort and happiness. Adjustment is natural living.

Not being able to adjust and always desiring more security, better comforts, always wanting more and more of what you desire, is artificial life. You only want it to satisfy your ego, but it is not really a need, it is a desire for the fulfilment of an ambition. When you try to fulfil unnecessary ambitions, it is artificial living. When you just try just to fulfil your needs, it is natural living. A natural life is not denying comforts and luxuries, but adapting to the environment. If today you have the opportunity of living in a five star hotel and tomorrow you have to live under the shade of a tree without any covering, be happy with both. This balance is natural living. In his guru's ashram Krishna lived a natural life, adjusting to the environment, realizing the needs, not the ambitions of life. There he was able to live yoga, not just practise yoga. That became the point of transformation of his attitudes and mentality.

The same thing happened in the life of Sri Rama. When the four brothers, Rama, Lakshman, Bharata and Shatrughna, were going to their guru's ashram, their father, Dasharatha, said, "I will build a special guesthouse and send servants, so that Rama, Lakshman and the brothers will have no problems." The guru said, "No, not in my ashram, because that is not the purpose of spiritual education."

Adapting to circumstances is the beginning of yogic life. Yoga says, learn to recognize your ambitions and your needs. Do not confuse your ambitions with your needs. Once we are able to recognize our needs and filter out and understand our ambitions, it is the beginning of yogic life, spiritual life.

### **Dharma in the Bhagavad Gita**

Sri Krishna lived yoga, experienced yoga, and then he propagated it on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. The opening statement of the *Bhagavad Gita* (1:1) is,

*Dharmakshetre kurukshetre samavetaa yuyutsavah,  
Maamakaah paandavaashchaiva kimakurvata sanjaya.*

O, Sanjaya, tell me what is happening in Dharmakshetra, in Kurukshetra, between my sons and the sons of Pandu.

On the battlefield of Kurukshetra, two armies have gathered, the army of the Pandavas and the army of the Kauravas. The patriarch of the family, Dhritarashtra, asks his minister, Sanjaya, to tell him what is happening. It is important to understand that the opening word is *Dharmakshetra*, the field of dharma. Why did Dhritarashtra not simply say, "Sanjaya, what is happening in Kurukshetra?" After all, Kurukshetra is the name of the location where the war was fought. But the first word is Dharmakshetra and Kurukshetra is only the second word.

Dharma is a unique concept. People say dharma is religion, but according to the Indian tradition dharma is not a religion, it is an expression of three qualities: positive thinking, balanced behaviour and righteous action. Positive thinking is *satvichara*. There is an entire scientific system

related to this type of mind. If you think for a moment what the balanced attitude or appropriate behaviour to adopt is, again you will discover an entire system of human expression and realizations about the human nature and mind, before appropriate behaviour, *satvyavahare*, can take place. If you think about auspicious actions, *satkarma*, you will see whether you are able to perform an auspicious action. Take one day, analyze your actions from morning until night and try to observe how many of the actions you performed were auspicious or righteous. You will find possibly that ten or fifteen percent were righteous actions. The rest had no meaning; they were wasteful action. Again this implies an entire science of transforming the action into positive expression.

### **Dharma versus adharmam**

Duryodhana, the chief prince and heir of the Kaurava clan, knew that his attitude and behaviour towards the Pandavas was not appropriate. He says in the *Mahabharata*,

*Janami dharmam na cha me pravritti.*  
*Janami adharmam na cha me nivritti.*

I know what righteousness is, but I am not attracted towards it. I know what wrong action is, but I cannot stop myself from doing it.

So, the opening statement of the *Bhagavad Gita* is, “O Sanjaya, please tell me what is happening in Dharmakshetra, the area where there is conflict between dharma and adharmam? What is happening in the physical location known as Kurukshetra between my sons and the sons of Pandu?” The patriarch of the family recognizes that the actions performed by his clan are not dharmic and he knows that when actions are not dharmic, it will always lead to chaos, conflict, pain, suffering and confusion. It was on this battlefield, which many people call ‘the battlefield of life’, that Sri Krishna gave the wisdom of yoga to Arjuna.

## **Bhagavad Gita – a psychological treatise**

Philosophers have said that the *Bhagavad Gita* is philosophical because the contents do not relate to our life today. But it is a psychological treatise, not a philosophical treatise. It contains the concept of yoga in relation to the development and management of the human personality, thought, action and wisdom. It is a practical approach to life. This education was given to Krishna in two forms – as theory and as practice.

Where does one find the practice of yoga in the *Bhagavad Gita*? Nowhere has Sri Krishna spoken in specific terms about yoga as Sage Patanjali has. The *Yoga Sutras* clearly define the process and the sequence of yoga as yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, dharana, dhyana and samadhi, but where do you find that in the *Bhagavad Gita*? With due respect, if you are a philosopher and not a yogi, you are not in a position to know where the practical teachings lie in the *Bhagavad Gita*. If you become a yogi, then you will know where the practical teachings are. The practical aspect will be the subject of our discussions. We will investigate this subject through the eyes of a yogi.

# Learning through Discipleship

## Practical Aspects of the Bhagavad Gita (Part 2)

We know the story of the *Mahabharata*. The armies of the Pandavas and the Kauravas had gathered on the field of Kurukshetra. Arjuna, one of the great warriors, was inspecting the armies when he fell into a state of depression due to delusion, *moha*, and attachment, *asakti*. He could not work out why there was going to be death and destruction in the family and in society because of the whims of a few people. He saw arrayed on the battlefield his family members, his grandfather, uncle, brothers and relatives ready to fight each other and die for something they believed in. Whether it was just or unjust is not the point here. Arjuna felt the shattering of his own personal values and went into a state of depression in which there was confusion of thought, confusion about dharma and justice, confusion about life and its associations. He could not think clearly about what needed to be done.

### **Conflict of dharma**

Although Krishna exhorted him to fight for righteousness, his dharma, right from the beginning, Arjuna, in that state of depression, would not listen to his instructions and guidance, despite knowing that Krishna was a very powerful figure. Remember that we are not talking of Sri Krishna as an incarnation of God, but as a person who has achieved something in his life through his experiences and efforts. Arjuna knew that Krishna was one of the great personalities

of his time. When he started talking to Krishna about the deluded state of his being and his confused values, Krishna tried to explain to him, but the barrier of attachment and delusion was so great that Krishna's words made no dent in Arjuna's thinking. So Krishna became quiet and said, "Give vent to your feelings as much as you need to and when you have exhausted yourself, maybe you will listen to me."

This is not only Sri Krishna's experience; it is also our experience. When people talk about their difficulties and problems, we try to understand and give them an answer with full sympathy. But when one is caught up in one's own problems, one is not willing or ready to accept any suggestions; the first priority is to simply express the bottled-up emotions that have shattered one's peace. At that time, instead of being a consultant and guide, you have to become a good listener. So Krishna remained silent until Arjuna had expressed all his feelings. The state of delusion had even affected his body. There was trembling, shivering, sweating, feelings of heat and cold, a state of nervous breakdown.

Ultimately, Arjuna said to Krishna (*Bhagavad Gita*, 2:7),

*Kaarpanyadoshopahatah svabhaavah  
Prachchhaami tvaam dharmasammoodhachetaah  
Yachchhreyah syaannishchitam broohi tanme  
Shishyasteham shaadhi maam tvaam prapannam.*

I am totally confused. I do not know what is right and what is wrong. There is a conflict of dharma. What should one do and what should one not do? How should one look at the present situation and deal with it, and how should one behave in order to establish dharma, righteousness? I am your disciple. Please guide me.

Even then Krishna did not say anything, until Arjuna said, "Now I am ready to listen to you. I bow my head respectfully before you. I am ready to become your disciple. Please remove the delusion in my mind, guide me and accept me as your disciple."

## **Psychological turning point**

This is the turning point in the *Bhagavad Gita*. Up to this point Arjuna was the commander-in-chief, while Krishna was playing the role of the charioteer, his subordinate. Normally, if the servant begins to give philosophical and practical lessons to his master, the master, because of ego and status, will not like it. But that was not the case in the relationship between Krishna and Arjuna. There was no ego involved. There was definitely mutual understanding. Krishna was able to sense the suffering and agony, the frustration and depression that Arjuna was feeling. But in order to maintain decorum, he waited until Arjuna placed himself in the role, not of commander of the army, but of a disciple who was willing to receive guidance and instructions.

There comes a time in our lives when we feel we cannot find the solutions to our problems through our own efforts. We feel that our intelligence and experiences have failed us. We have no foundation, no basis, no experience of how to manage the situation, because it is totally alien to our nature. At that time, the personal ego is destroyed. You realize that you are not the master of your own self, although you had thought you were. When you realize that you have been living a false identity, a false awareness, a false reality, you feel there is no substance and no stability in your life. That is the turning point, which makes arrogance bow in front of the master, the guru. The person who is able to surrender the ego to the master is known as a disciple, a *shishya*.

## **Becoming a disciple**

Very few people become shishyas. Many become students, many can become aspirants, but being a shishya is the last state of surrender, the last stage of acceptance. When you know you have no control over yourself, that you are unable to guide yourself, when all the links with your ego are disconnected and you find yourself floundering in mid-ocean, at that time, even a blade of grass becomes a support. The concept of discipleship is seen here. This is a very important idea that you need to think about. Many people think that by being



initiated into mantra they become disciples. Wrong! Many people think that by taking initiation into karma sannyasa or jignasu sannyasa they have become disciples. Wrong! Many people say, “I follow this guru or that guru, and I follow the instructions of the guru to the letter, and therefore I am a disciple.” Wrong!

When you begin a journey, you want to learn. The learning happens through the intellect. This is the starting point. Aurobindo has stated, “In the beginning intellect was an aid to my development, but at the end intellect became a barrier to my growth.” We begin our journey, our learning, through the agency of *buddhi*, intellect. As long as we are using our intellect to understand the system, the sequence, the procedure, the theory and practice of a subject, whether material or spiritual, we are only students.

You may be a sannyasin, the follower of a guru. You may be a *grihastha*, a householder. No matter what role you may play in the beginning, you will only be a student. Later, possibly after many years, when what you have learnt begins to take root in your life, you begin to feel the transformation and you become an aspirant. Then your heart connects with the experience of transformation. You begin to accept and understand the association of a lifestyle with your present environment and condition, and you try to go deeper with feeling, sensitivity, compassion and love, as an aspirant.

When you simply let go of the control over your life, which is the final surrender, then you become a shishya. Do not misunderstand the words ‘let go of the control over your life,’ because many people feel insecure and frightened. They say, “If I let go of myself, if I surrender myself, what will remain? Other people can manipulate me. Other people can twist me. Other people can make me go on the wrong path.” Such insecurities and fears arise. But by the time you are ready to become a disciple, you will have developed enough understanding of the process and a level of communication with the teacher to give birth to faith and trust. It is this faith and trust that will allow you to surrender yourself totally. Without it, surrender will never happen. When we

have surrendered our ego, when our logic is surrendered, then there is acceptance and experience, not confusion or discussion. It is then that the spiritual energy begins to manifest.

### **Delusions of discipleship**

There are many kinds of disciples. Yoga says one type of disciple is a *dhela*, a lump of clay, who simply thinks he has become a disciple and continues to think he is a disciple, but there is no change or transformation in him. The *dhela* always remains a lump of clay until the end. Another category of disciple is the *thela*, the pushcart. The *thela* will only move as long as someone is pushing it, because it is not self-propelled. Such people are also in abundance. They say, “I will only follow the mandate and guidance of my guru. If he tells me to do something, I will do it. Otherwise the world can go to hell, I am not going to move.” Then there is the *chela*, which many people think is the real disciple.

Once upon a time, a man came to a guru and said, “Guruji, please make me your disciple.” The guru told him to come back in a month. The man replied, “But I want to become your disciple today, not in a month.” The guru said, “If you want to become my disciple, you will have to give me your body, your mind, your feelings, your ego and your spirit.” The aspirant agreed, and said, “From today, I have nothing that I can call mine. My body, mind, feelings, ego and spirit are all yours.” So the guru agreed to accept him as a disciple. He sent the man home to attend to his family duties and obligations, telling him, “Come when I call you.”

Summer came. Someone told the guru that the disciple had a large mango orchard with the best mangoes in the kingdom. Why not ask him for thirty or forty mangoes for the disciples and residents of the ashram? The guru agreed. When the man heard of the request, he wrote, “Dear Guruji, I have given you my body, my mind, my emotions, my spirit, but don’t ask for my mangoes.”

This is the *chela* who says he has given everything, but when the time comes will always find an excuse not to give.

The ego comes in between, and this subtle ego creates a barrier in the relationship that can exist between the guru and disciple. We are chelas. We have surrendered ourselves, but there comes a point when the guru tests us and we feel, “Oh, this is something I have not yet surrendered and it hurts me to give it up.”

### **Union with God**

The fourth quality of a disciple is *atmabhava*, being one with the guru. When you become one with the guru, the highest quality of surrender, then no matter what he may ask you to do, whether you are near or far away, the connection will always be vibrant. You will always look at the good qualities you are receiving from the guru. The learning you are receiving from the guru, which is transforming your life, will be the source of inspiration.

It happened to Milarepa in Tibet. When Milarepa went to his guru, Marpa told him, “You don’t have to participate in my satsangs and classes, you just have to live here and work.” If you had been in Milarepa’s shoes, you would have thought, “I have come here for learning, for spiritual emancipation, and the teacher is telling me not to come to his satsangs and lessons, but just to work like a servant, like a slave. What kind of a man is he?” But Milarepa accepted it. He said, “I will do it because I have accepted you as my master, and there is no confusion within me. Whatever your mandate may be, I will follow it and complete it.” The guru said, “Is that so? Then build a house for me on top of that mountain. The stone quarry is down below. Cut the stones and rocks there and carry them one by one to the top of the mountain.”

For six months Milarepa toiled day and night, carrying rocks up the mountain on his back to construct the house. When it was completed, he called his guru to inspect the house. Marpa said, “I don’t like the location. I would prefer the house to be down below. Carry the rocks down one by one and construct another house with them at the base of the mountain.” Milarepa did not complain. He took the stones,

one by one, and started rebuilding the house at the base of the mountain.

Meanwhile the guru was watching and one day he said to Milarepa, “You are very slow. Move quickly!” and gave him a push. Milarepa had become very weak and fell down a precipice. While falling, his only thought was, “What a shame that I could not fulfil my guru’s mandate!” Then an invisible hand lifted him up and placed him in front of the guru. Marpa said to Milarepa, “From today, you have become my master.” What an ode to a disciple! Never before had a guru made such a statement to a disciple. Milarepa had passed the ultimate test, atmabhava, where the ego did not enter at all. Up to the chela stage the ego comes in, but beyond that, when you are established in atmabhava, the ego is dissolved. This atmabhava is discipleship, *shishyatva*.

### **Krishna guides Arjuna**

Now we understand when Arjuna says to Krishna, “I am your disciple. Please guide and instruct me.” Krishna replies, “Now that you have surrendered yourself, now that you have no ego and are willing to follow, listen carefully to my instructions and guidance. First of all, in order to overcome confusion and delusion, try to become stable in mind.”

In yoga, four states of mind are defined: *moodha*, the dormant mind, *kshipta*, the immature mind, *vikshipta*, the dissipated mind, and *ekagra*, the focused mind. In the state of delusion and attachment. Arjuna was experiencing the *vikshipta* or confused state of mind. So he asked Krishna (*Bhagavad Gita*, 2:54) to describe the focused state of mind, and how a person who has attained that state of mind behaves, acts, thinks and lives.

*Sthitaprajnasya kaa bhaashaa samaadhisthasya keshava  
Sthitadheeh kim prabhaasheta kimaaseeta vrajeta kim.*

What is the definition of a person who has balanced wisdom, who is of stable mind and established in perfect tranquillity? How does he speak, how does he sit, how does he walk?

*Sthitaprajna* indicates the ekagra mind, the unwavering mind. In yoga there are two types of mind. The pure mind is unwavering, undisturbed by the influence of the senses and sense objects, desires, feelings and emotions. The impure mind is subject to the influence of the sense objects.

Both states can be explained by an example. If you light a candle out in the open, the flame will not be steady. The slightest wind will cause it to move. To steady the flame we have to create a barrier to ensure that the wind does not affect the burning flame. The moment we create a barrier, the flame becomes steady. The fluctuating impure mind is the unsteady flame which is under the influence of the flow of the wind and air. When you are able to control the mind and separate it from the objects of attachment and association with the senses, it becomes steady. That is the state of *sthitaprajna*. *Sthita* means ‘stable’, *prajna* means ‘wisdom’. What a beautiful concept of mind. Stable wisdom is the final conditioning of mind.

## **Wisdom**

Throughout life you accumulate knowledge which is only understanding in the form of concepts, ideas and words that you retain in your memory. As long as knowledge is not applied, it is not wisdom. You may know many things, but you are a person without wisdom. Applied knowledge equals wisdom. The state of wisdom means one who is able to understand what is right and wrong, good and bad, positive and negative, righteous and unrighteous; one who is able to discriminate between the two poles of life and remain totally poised in equilibrium. This is the tranquil mind, not the agitated mind.

Krishna instructs Arjuna, “You know many things. I am not going to give you lessons in dharma now. You have learnt your lessons from your gurus. Just remember those teachings and apply them. Right now you are feeling disturbed because you are associating with your attachments, desires and feelings, with the people you consider to be your own.”

He states (*Bhagavad Gita*, 2:55),

*Prajahaati yadaa kaamaan sarvaan partha manogataan  
Aatmanyevaatamanaa tushtah sthitaprajnastadochyate.*

When one thoroughly dismisses all the desires of the mind and is satisfied in the self, then he is said to have a stable mind, to be of steady wisdom.

*Kaman* means desire, attachment, to become associated with. *Pra* is the prefix, indicating something with which you are very deeply and closely associated. You are deeply associated with your desires, ambitions and needs, with your drive to experience fulfilment through selfish actions. Disassociate yourself from that and you will find peace.

Arjuna poses the question, “You say disassociate from desires and attachments in order to have a stable, tranquil mind. Please guide me as to how to attain this form of disassociation.” Then Krishna says (*Bhagavad Gita*, 2:58),

*Yadaa samharate chaayam koormongaaneeva sarvashah  
Indriyaaneendriyaarthebhyastasya prajnaa pratishthita.*

When, like the turtle which withdraws its limbs on all sides into its shell, one learns to withdraw the senses from the sense objects, then wisdom becomes steady.

This is the first reference Sri Krishna makes to *pratyahara*, and it comes in the second chapter. When Arjuna asks, “How does one disassociate oneself?” Krishna replies, “Practise *pratyahara*,” as simple as that. What is *pratyahara*? Look at a turtle. When a turtle feels frightened, it withdraws its limbs – one head, two arms, two legs, one tail. Six organs are withdrawn. *Manah shashthaaneendriyaani* (*Bhagavad Gita*, 15:7) – the mind is the sixth organ.

When the immutable unchangeable self, the pure transcendental spirit, comes into the fold of *prakriti*, nature, and is given a body, that spirit comes with five sense organs, *indriyas*, and a mind. These are the six organs. The head of the turtle is the mind which needs to be withdrawn from the

sense objects. The two arms, two legs and tail symbolize the five *karmendriyas*, senses of action, and the five *jnanendriyas*, senses of perception, that also need to be withdrawn. Learn to do that.

### **The power of the senses**

Sri Krishna states (*Bhagavad Gita*, 2:60),

*Yatato hyapi kaunteya purushasya vipashchitah  
Indriyaani pramatheenani haranti prasabham manah.*

Turbulent by nature, the senses forcibly carry away even the mind of a wise man who is practising self-control.

This is a very important statement. Once you begin to practise *pratyahara*, you start to withdraw yourself. But remember that the withdrawal will never be final because the attraction and the gravitational pull of the sense objects is so strong that sometimes even sages lose their balance.

You know the story of Vishwamitra, one of the great *tapasvis*, who was infatuated with Menaka. Can you believe this great *tapasvi*, who gave the world the science of *Gayatri*, being infatuated with Menaka? According to Sri Krishna's statement, it can be believed. Or take the example of Narada, a person with the ability to roam in different universes, a person who associated closely with God. He had such a fickle and naughty mind that you could never believe he was a *Brahmarishi*. He loved to create a fight between two people and then sit back and watch. Sri Krishna states in the *Bhagavad Gita* that the senses are so powerful in the realm of *prakriti* that even the most stable mind can be swayed by their force.

### **Prakriti**

*Prakriti* is manifest nature. When we say *prakriti*, everyone thinks of nature, the elements, the moon, the earth and the trees. They think that creation is *prakriti*. However, the real meaning of *prakriti* is when an action takes place continuously without stopping. The Sanskrit root of *prakriti* is *krit*, meaning 'to perform, to act, to do', and *pra* is the

prefix, which means ‘with force, intense’. It has a strong emphasis on action, a state where change and movement are predominant, not stability. When the senses are subject to prakriti, what is their role? When the senses are not subject to prakriti, they cease to exist. Again and again the effort has to be made to find the focus, the centre, the balance. That is the aim of pratyahara.

The concept of pratyahara implies self-observation. Through self-observation you move to self-analysis, from self-analysis to self-discrimination, through self-discrimination to self-correction, through self-correction to self-transformation. This is the system of pratyahara starting with self-observation. Here Sri Krishna is speaking about the state of pratyahara; later he talks about the practices of pratyahara as well.

### **Meaning of pratyahara**

According to yoga, pratyahara has two meanings. *Pratyaya* means ‘seed’, the seed inside our personality which becomes our nature when it manifests. If you plant a mango seed, you can expect a mango from it, not a guava. The result is always contained in the cause. A mango seed will give mango fruit. When the seed in our personality develops, it will create a particular type of mentality and nature which will be unique to us. That is known as pratyaya. Pratyahara is awareness of the seed, the building block of human personality.

The second meaning of pratyahara is *ahara*, ‘craving’, ‘desiring’, and *prati*, ‘internal’, observation of the internal desires, observation of the movement of the subtle energy, the energy of the mind. Yoga sees energy as having two forms. One is *prana shakti*, the energy which is manifesting in the physical body, in the physical dimension and which is experienced as physical vitality and dynamism. It is observed as the physical movement of the senses. The second form of energy is *chitta shakti*, the subtle energy responsible for the movement of the mind, the mental force. Chitta shakti is the seed of ahara, craving, desire. Desire is generated in the mind and cravings are an experience of the mind. When the



cravings are powerful and predominant, that is ‘prati’ plus ‘ahara’ – observation of personal desires, observation of the state of craving. Pratyahara has these two meanings. The only way to balance the turbulent mind, knowing fully well that this turbulence is due to the association of the mind with the sense objects, is by observing, isolating, withdrawing the mind, or entering the state of pratyahara.

Then Arjuna says, “I can understand what you are saying in theory, but please tell me specific methods by which I can control, direct and pacify my mind.” The practice that Krishna taught Arjuna on the battlefield is the subject of our next discussion.

# Achieving Mental Balance

Practical Aspects of the Bhagavad Gita (Part 3)

## PRATYAHARA PRACTICE 1

Sit down comfortably, with the body upright and straight, the hands on the knees or in the lap, wherever comfortable. Close your eyes. For some time, become aware of the whole body mentally. Become aware of the physical posture, the position of the legs, the position of the hands and arms, the position of the whole body. Observe the body mentally. Relax it. (Pause) Become aware of the stillness in the body. The whole body is motionless and still. Complete awareness of the physical stillness. The whole body is absolutely motionless, absolutely still. Feel, develop and experience stillness in the body. (Pause)

Focus your attention on the flow of the natural breath inside the nostrils. As you breathe in, feel the cool sensation as the air passes through the nostrils into the lungs. As you breathe out, be aware of the warmth inside the nostrils as the breath comes out. Be aware of every inhalation and exhalation by observing the temperature of the breath as you breathe in and as you breathe out. (Long pause)

Complete awareness of the still body and the breath. Observe the breath. Experience the breath. (Long pause)

Now focus the attention at the eyebrow centre. In front of the closed eyes, visualize the image of a burning flame. See the image, the symbol of the flame, the jyoti, at the eyebrow centre. Keeping the attention fixed on the symbol of the jyoti, become aware of all the physical sensations, the sensations of

heat and cold, of the wind against the body. Observe the state of physical motionlessness and the different sensations you can experience in the body. (Pause)

If you are feeling the wind, become aware of the caress of the wind. If there is any tension or tightness, then become aware of that, but do not move the body. Deepen the awareness and observe all the sensations. (Long pause)

Become aware of the sounds. Be like the microphone of a tape recorder which picks up each and every sound within its range. But remember, you are not disturbed by the sounds. You only have to recognize that they exist. (Pause)

You are at peace with yourself. In order to develop awareness of the feeling of peace, focus on physical stability, physical motionlessness. Focus on the symbol of the flame and recognize all the sounds that exist around you. (Pause)

While you are observing all the sounds, and the motionlessness of the physical body, maintain continuous and constant awareness of the flame. (Long pause)

The symbol of the flame, the image in front of the closed eyes, must be absolutely still and motionless, like a burning candle in a room where there is no flow of air. There the flame of the candle is steady. Develop the same sensation within you. You are sitting inside a room observing the flame, still and steady. Outside the room there is noise, there is wind, there is movement. You are only a witness of everything that is happening around you, and you are the experiencer of the stillness and silence within. You are the observer of the chaos around you. You are the experiencer of the silence and stillness within you. (Long pause)

Slowly move the body. Rub the hands together and place the palms of your hands over your eyes, then gently open your eyes.

*Hari Om Tat Sat*

## Inner balance

According to yoga, pratyahara is a system of withdrawing the senses from outside, withdrawing the awareness from the sense objects and becoming the observer, the *drashita*, or seer of what is happening around you, yet maintaining inner serenity. In the short concentration practice we just did, you were asked to become the witness, the observer of the situation around you – the noise, the sensations, the people, the environment, the time, the place, etc. At the same time you were asked to maintain awareness of and to experience inner serenity. Were you able to observe both states of mind? When you were fixed on the symbol of the flame and when you were asked to maintain the stillness and steadiness of the flame, you would have noticed that despite the external distractions, there was a sensation, a feeling of inner stability, inner silence, inner immobility, or you may even call it an experience of space, internal space. You felt as if you were sitting in a room with four glass walls and observing what was happening outside the four walls, while inside there was absolute peace and calmness. This is the state of pratyahara that Sri Krishna has indicated.

He has said that when one thoroughly dismisses all the cravings of the mind and is satisfied in the self, then that inner equilibrium or equipoised state of mind is the stable mind. Our mind is disturbed and influenced by three factors: *raga*, passion or attachment, *bhaya*, fear or insecurity, and *krodha*, anger or aggression. These three constantly influence our mind and disturb its stability.

## Delusion versus discrimination

There is a very beautiful description of the human psychological state in the *Bhagavad Gita* (2: 62–63):

*Dhyaayato vishayaanpumsah sangasteshoopajaayate  
Sangaat sanjaayate kaamah kaamaatkrodhobhijaayate.  
Krodhaadbhavati sammohah sammohaatsmritivibhramah  
Smritibhramshaad buddhinaasho buddhinaashatpranashyati.*

When a person thinks of objects, attachment for them arises; from attachment desire is born; from desire anger arises; from anger comes delusion, from delusion loss of memory, from loss of memory the destruction of discrimination; from destruction of discrimination one perishes.

In these slokas Sri Krishna is describing the entire psychological make-up of an individual who is involved in and influenced by the association of the senses with the objects of the world. He says that when there is deep identification with the senses, and the entire mind is diverted to experience that external identification, this gives birth to *asakti*, attachment, and *kama*, desire, passion, obsession, craving – *sangat sanjayate kamah*. If you are able to fulfil your aspirations, needs, ambitions and desires, then you are content and happy. But if you are not able to do so, the unfulfilled cravings and desires will give birth to anxiety and aggression – *kamat krodhobhijaayate*. From anger comes delusion – *krodhaadbhavati sammohah*. From delusion comes confusion of memory – *sammohatsmritivibhramah*. Delusion will restrict the area in which the intellect expresses itself. Once the area of intellectual, rational and discriminative ability is restricted, then there is loss of memory.

Loss of memory indicates confusion. Memory includes recollection of good and bad beliefs, thoughts and actions. In your life you have performed good actions and that has been imprinted in your mind in the form of memory. You have been involved in wrong actions, and the impressions of the wrong actions are also in your memory. You have experienced peace, happiness and joy, suffering, pain, conflict and confusion. All these have been retained by the mind in the form of memory.

In the state of delusion, *moha*, where there is only one focus, an obsessive desire, the discriminating ability, the memory of what is good and what is bad is not recognized. So, when Sri Krishna speaks of loss of memory, it means loss of inner clarity, disconnection from the experience you have had in the past. At that time, only selfishness predominates: “I

desire, I want, why can't I get it!" There is no discrimination. Once there is no discrimination or *viveka buddhi*, there is also loss of wisdom. Once the reasoning power is gone, then you may as well be considered dead.

The reasoning faculty is the essential quality of human life. If you do not apply this quality to yourself and to your environment, then you are not a human being but a reactive animal. You are not a thinking person. The humanity and the clarity within you dissipates, you become more and more engrossed and are sucked in by the attractions of the material world. The moment you are pulled into the material world, you lose your sense of balance, harmony, inner equilibrium and joy, and you begin to live in a state of confusion, frustration, anxiety and depression.

Therefore, when these three states of mind: attachment, insecurity and anger, become powerful, there is no peace of mind, happiness or fulfilment. So the aim of *pratyahara* is not only to withdraw and disassociate the mind from attachment to objects, but also to eradicate the negative influences of desire, fear and anger. This is the beginning of the state of *pratyahara* in yoga.

To digress for a moment, people desire peace and happiness. But where in this psychological sequence described by Krishna are we going to attain it? In our association with sense objects? We cannot achieve contentment or fulfilment if there is *raga*, obsessive desire; that will never give the experience of peace.

There is a saying in Hindi that a craving is pregnant with another craving even before it is born. Desire is pregnant with another desire even before it manifests itself. Before you are able to fulfil one craving, you realize that another has taken birth, and before you are able to satisfy that one, a third and a fourth have taken birth. This is the vicious circle of *vasana*, obsessive craving and obsessive desire. This association of the mind with the sense objects is continuous and constant and cannot be stopped. It will never allow us to become peaceful, happy and fulfilled. Even Sri Krishna has said it is not possible to attain peace in life. So what is possible?

## Pratyahara – balancing the two paths

We come back to *sanyam*, restraint. Our energies and efforts are being directed outwards and we cannot change that because of our environment. There is no way that anyone can say, “From today my efforts will be only for spiritual fulfilment, not for material fulfilment.”

In *Aparokshanubhuti*, Adi Shankaracharya has very clearly stated that a bird needs two wings to fly; it cannot fly with only one wing. Similarly, in order to attain fulfilment in life, human beings need to have one wing for materialistic expression and another for spiritual expression. The material and spiritual expressions have to be balanced. You cannot ignore spirituality for the sake of material gain, and you cannot ignore material gain for the sake of spirituality.

This is where some confusion has entered our lives, because we have started to believe that spiritual life is anti-material and that material life is anti-spiritual. But it is not so. Nowhere should the idea exist that you have to reject one path in order to progress on the other path. If people think this way, it is because they do not have experience, knowledge and perception of the Indian spiritual tradition.

You may ask how this is possible, because both paths seem to be so different to each other. However, they do co-exist, just as your right eye cannot see your left eye and your left eye cannot see your right eye, but they co-exist. If you try to see with only one eye, you will perceive only half the reality. In order to get a complete picture, more effort is required, more struggle is involved. But if you have two eyes, there is less difficulty and you are able to see the greater picture with much more ease.

Sometimes the material and spiritual lives of an individual may contradict each other. Material life says association with the senses and sense objects is its primary goal, and spiritual life says disassociation from the senses and sense objects is its primary goal. One emphasizes attachment, the other detachment. One emphasizes obsessive passion, the other dispassion. The practices for spiritual realization are there to

find a balance between attachment and detachment, between passion and dispassion.

### **Rediscovering the drashta**

When the mind is involved and engrossed in the outside world, there is loss of mental clarity, loss of the quality of balance, harmony and equilibrium. When you begin to practise pratyahara, you rediscover one aspect of your nature, or personality, which can be detached from what is happening outside. It is that aspect of your nature which becomes the observer, the drashta, the seer, the experienter.

In yoga the experience and the experienter are two different things. For example, you feel hungry or thirsty. Hunger or thirst is a reality, an experience, but when you begin to relate that reality to yourself, you become the experienter, *anubhava karta*. When you do not relate to the experience, you do not feel hunger or thirst, but just because you do not feel it, you cannot deny the existence of hunger and thirst. They continue to exist as experiences, but because you are not the experienter at that moment, they are not the object of your attention or awareness. Similarly, in pratyahara, there is balance of mind, but it is not the focus of your awareness. How do we bring that balance into focus? By disconnecting or disassociating the mind from its outer connections.

This is the whole principle of yoga which you find in the first three sutras of Sage Patanjali: *Atha yoganushasanam* – yoga is a form of inner discipline. *Yogaschitta vritti nirodhah* – leading to cessation or balance or harmony of the mental modifications. *Tada drashtuh swaroope'vasthanam* – then the drashta is established in self-awareness. The harmony that you experience after you are able to control, channel and direct the activities of the mind will ensure that you become the observer. It will increase your awareness of what is happening to yourself and of how you can apply your wisdom to face different situations in life. It will bring calmness of mind by eradicating attachment, fear and anger.



## **Pranayama awakens pratyahara**

Arjuna then asks Krishna, “Can you tell me how one can perfect pratyahara?” and Krishna tells Arjuna that one has to practise pranayama. Without the practice of pranayama you are not able to awaken the energy within yourself, because right now all your energies are directed outwards. Krishna states (*Bhagavad Gita*, 3:42),

*Indriyaani paraanyaahuh indriyebhyah param manah  
Manasastu paraa buddhiryo buddheh paratastu sah.*

The senses are said to be superior to the body; superior to the senses is the mind; superior to the mind is the intellect; and superior even to the intellect is the atma, the inner spirit.

When we are identified with the senses, we are identifying with the lower level of our personality. The higher level of our personality, beyond the senses, is the mind. Realize that. Higher than mind is the intellect, *viveka buddhi*, the discriminative faculty. Realize that. Higher than the discriminative ability is the still and silent nature of the Self, which is the atma. If you are to move from the realm of the senses to the realm of the inner spirit, you have to ensure that you are able to harmonize the body, which is the experiencer of the senses. The body is controlled by prana; the senses are controlled by prana. Therefore, ensure that you practise pranayama.

## **Prana and the five koshas**

Yoga does not see the physical body as the ultimate. Rather, yoga has the concept that within the physical body there are four other subtle bodies, *koshas* or sheaths. The physical body is *annamaya kosha*, the dimension of physical experience. Then there is *pranamaya kosha*, the body of energy. Within the physical structure is *manomaya kosha*, the dimension of mental experience. Then there is *vijnanamaya kosha*, the dimension of consciousness and energy, and finally there is *anandamaya kosha*, the body of bliss, fullness, the integrated nature.

Our physical body and our senses are energized by prana shakti. In *Prashnopanishad* there is the story that once upon a time the different senses of the body had a discussion as to who was the greatest amongst them. The eyes said, “We are great because through us people are able to observe and understand, to create an image or form and recognize that image and act accordingly.” The ears said, “No, we are important . . . “ and in this way each sense of the body claimed importance.

When Prana heard this, it thought to itself, “Let me withdraw and sit quietly. Let them finish their discussion and then I will become active.” The moment Prana withdrew itself, all the other senses and the mind had no energy; they could not function. So they went to Prana, saying, “Become active again, because without you we are nothing.” This story emphasizes that prana shakti is the central force of the physical body, material life. In the absence of prana shakti, this *annamaya sharira*, this physical body, will be dead. Once the physical body dies with the withdrawal of prana, the senses also cease to exist and the individual spirit, the atma, merges with the universal spirit, *paramatma*.

Yoga says that for progress in spiritual life it is all right to learn to concentrate, to meditate and to do your sadhana, but you must awaken the prana shakti within you. The awakening of prana shakti happens prior to controlling the mind.

### **Pranayama and ashtanga yoga**

In the ashtanga yoga of Sage Patanjali, there is asana, pranayama and then pratyahara. Why does pranayama come before pratyahara? What is the purpose of pranayama and how is it practised? According to Sri Krishna, we should practise shutting out all thought of external enjoyments, with the gaze fixed on the space between the eyebrows, and regulate the prana shakti. Then regulate the prana and the apana which flow as breath within the nostrils. Only after regulating the prana are you able to bring your senses, mind and intellect under control. In the *Bhagavad Gita* (5:27–28), Sri Krishna states,

*Sparshaankritvaa bahirbaahyaamshchakshushchaivaantare bhruvoh  
Pranaapaanau samau kritvaa naasaabhyantarachaarinau.  
Yatendriyamanobuddhirmunirmokshaparaayanah  
Vigatechchhaabhayakrodho yah sadaa mukta eva sah.*

Shutting out all thoughts of the external environment, with the gaze fixed on the space between the eyebrows, having equalized the currents of prana and apana flowing within the nostrils, controlled the senses, mind and intellect, such a contemplative soul, intent on liberation and free from desire, fear and anger, is truly free forever.

These are the instructions that you practised in the meditation practice preceding this discussion. You fixed the gaze at the eyebrow centre with the image of the flame. Otherwise where would you fix it? If there is nothing to hold the attention, the mind will waver again. You experienced the breath, the incoming and the outgoing breath, the sensation within the nostrils of coolness and warmth, the prana and the apana, shutting off the senses, entering the inner compartment of the mind where the flame was held steady while observing the chaotic environment around you. When pratyahara is extended, one becomes free from desire, fear and anger and attains liberation. In the *Bhagavad Gita* (5:26) Sri Krishna states,

*Kaamakrodhaviyuktaanaam yateenaam yatachetasaam  
Abhito brahmanirvanam vartate viditaatmanaam.*

Absolute freedom exists on all sides for those self-controlled ascetics who are free from desire and anger, who have controlled their thoughts and who have realized the self.

Our guru, Swami Satyananda, used to tell the story of a bird flying over the ocean. Halfway through its flight, it becomes tired. What will it do? It cannot land in the middle of the ocean to rest, so it will try to find a piece of floating wood or maybe some dry land to rest on. If it is unable to find land, it will always return to the same piece of floating wood to rest and then again take off. In yoga we also need an *adhara*,

a support, a foundation, a basis, an object on which to rest, relax, energize and then continue. To perfect pratyahara and achieve dharana, inner concentration, pranayama is the support.

Yoga has said that within the body there are various expressions of prana shakti, and it has classified prana shakti in the form of five sub-pranas according to their functions. The first function of prana is inhalation, to energize the personality, the body and the mind. The second function of prana is exhalation, elimination, removal of toxins, waste matter, the carbon from the lungs. The third function is assimilation, what the body takes in is broken down into energy particles and consumed. The fourth function is motion, activity of the senses and the physical organs. The fifth function is to provide equal energy to all the organs.

The literal meaning of the word *pranayama* is increasing the dimension of prana shakti – *prana*, energy, plus *ayama*, expansion. You are aware of yourself as a person. You know your abilities and limitations. You work from morning until night. You are involved in a routine, and according to this routine and its activities, you experience peaks and lows of energy. If you are able to increase the length of the peaks by expanding the quality of the prana shakti within you, then you will feel less tired. The moment you energize yourself with pranayama, there is expansion of prana shakti. The area of pranic activity increases. Lengthening the prana shakti is one meaning of pranayama.

Another meaning of pranayama is controlling and guiding the flow of prana as it manifests through the senses and through the mind. *Yama* means to hold, to restrain the prana shakti. You begin to hold on when you begin to realize that your energies are being wasted in useless pursuits of the senses which are not going to give satisfaction or happiness. So you begin to withdraw and to focus your attention on something else. That is holding back, withdrawing, restraining the association of the senses with the sense objects.

When you withdraw the prana shakti, your senses become weak and then the corresponding part in the mind will also

lose its intensity. The obsessive desire will be more dissipated, not focused; it will lose its obsessiveness and simply become a desire which you can adjust, accommodate and even manipulate.

In the *Yoga Sutras*, Sage Patanjali talks of three types of pranayama: i) breathing in, ii) breathing out, and iii) retaining the breath, holding the breath, not breathing. When Sage Patanjali says pranayama is breathing in, we begin to think that he is talking of the physical process of breathing. But breath is not prana; breath is *shvasa*. Breathing is *shvasan kriya*, inhalation and exhalation. When Sage Patanjali says that pranayama is breathing in, he is indicating a stage of perfection where you are able to accumulate prana within yourself. When he says pranayama is breathing out, he is indicating a stage where you are able to distribute that prana shakti for your mental and spiritual growth. When he says pranayama is holding the breath, it indicates that there is no movement of prana, that prana has become stable.

How does one develop awareness of prana? Yoga says to start with breath awareness. The moods and states of the mind are reflected in the way we breathe in and out. If we are agitated, nervous, tense and angry, our breathing pattern will be very shallow. The breath will be short and will remain in the upper thoracic region. When you are very angry, observe your breathing. When you are relaxed, the breath is very deep, long and relaxed. Sometimes you may not even notice that you are breathing in, it is so gentle. So, yogis use the breath to regulate and harmonize the physical systems, like the nervous system. They use the breath to tranquillize the functions of the mind.

### **Jagrat, swapna, nidra and turiya**

Yogis did not have the concept of beta, alpha, theta and delta waves, but they had the concept of jagrat, swapna, sushupti and turiya, the four states of the mind. There is a distinct pattern of mental waves in all four states. *Jagrat* describes full activity of the mind and brain, and in this full activity

there is dissipation of energy. Science has recognized this recently. When beta waves are predominant in the brain, there is dissipation, activity and distraction. You are not relaxed, centred, balanced or focused.

*Swapna* is literally translated as the state of dream, but in yoga it does not mean dream but a relaxed mind, one contained within itself. It is aware and alert. *Swapna* is the mind looking inwards. *Jagrat* describes the mind looking outwards, identifying name, form and idea, recognizing different things. That is *jagrat avastha*, the externally awake state. But in *swapna*, when the mind is looking inwards, it is seeing the internal experience, not the external objects. That experience is the same as the outer one of name, form, idea, quality. The same thing that is perceived outside, in *swapna avastha* is perceived inside. So we begin to dream. We begin to see the images that are ingrained in our psyche, in our mind, and that is then recognized as dream. If I see you outside in *jagrat*, in *swapna* I will see you inside. When I see everything, the vision, the picture, the images inside me, my senses are focused inwards, and then the experience of the mind is more passive. The alpha brainwave experience is the passive experience.

Then comes *nidra*, where there is no re-creation of the outer objects in the inner mental world; there is an absolute blank, deep relaxation, theta waves. Then when you go deeper into that state of relaxation and are able to experience inner tranquillity, that is the *turiya* state. Intense concentration gives the delta state, the identification or experience of that deep relaxation which is leading you to harmony, balance and peace.

### **Pranayama activates at all levels**

Pranayama is the activation of prana shakti in these mental states and in the brain. Often you may have noticed that when you wake up in the morning, although you may have slept for eight or ten hours, physically and mentally you are still totally exhausted. This indicates that sleep does not replenish prana shakti. Sleep only relaxes the body.

The source of prana shakti is not sleep, it is the activation of ida and pingala nadis, and this activation is the purpose of pranayama.

*Pingala*, on the right, represents the solar, vital force or energy, and *ida*, on the left, represents the lunar, subtle force. Yogis have said that in order to perfect pranayama: i) use breath awareness to attain physical tranquillity, ii) activate ida and pingala nadis, the flows of prana shakti by regulating the external breath, and iii) focus at the point where the two nadis, the two flows meet at the eyebrow centre.

If you look at a representation of the system of chakras in yoga, you will notice that there are seven chakras: mooladhara, swadhisthana, manipura, anahata, vishuddhi, ajna and sahasrara. Mooladhara is the centre from where the two nadis, ida and pingala, emerge. They come to swadhisthana, cross over and go to manipura, where they cross over and go to anahata. Crossing over again, they go to vishuddhi and cross again and go to ajna. From mooladhara to ajna, there are two flows, ida and pingala, but beyond ajna there is only one flow. Beyond ajna, the two nadis merge and become a single nadi. That is the point where concentration has to be developed.

“With the gaze fixed on the space between the two eyebrows, having regulated the prana and apana breath flowing within the nostrils, bring the senses, mind and intellect under control.” This is the practice of pranayama leading to pratyahara as taught by Sri Krishna to Arjuna.























# Deepening Yogic Knowledge

Practical Aspects of the Bhagavad Gita (Part 4)

## PRATYAHARA PRACTICE 2

Sit in a comfortable posture, with the body upright and straight. Place the hands on top of the knees or in the lap, whichever is most comfortable. Gently close your eyes.

Centre the attention in the body. Become aware of the whole body from the top of the head right down to the toes. In one glimpse, in one thought, visualize the whole body. Try to see yourself, the posture of your body, mentally. Observe each and every part of the body.

Become comfortable, release the tensions, organize your posture so that you are at ease with yourself. For a few moments become aware of the physical stability, the motionlessness. (Long pause)

Focus your attention within the body. (Pause)

Once the physical posture is comfortable and steady, bring your attention to the eyebrow centre. Hold the attention at the eyebrow centre and try to see within the mind, in front of the closed eyes, the image of a burning candle flame . . . In the beginning it is only a process of imagination. As the concentration deepens, you will begin to see the image of the flame gradually. Develop awareness of the flame at the eyebrow centre. (Pause)

Fix the attention on the symbol of the flame at the eyebrow centre. (Pause)



Internalize the consciousness totally, completely, and just be aware of the flame. As you deepen your awareness of the flame, experience the stillness of the body, the state of silence within the body, and the feeling of space in the body. (Long pause)

Maintaining the awareness of the physical stability, maintaining the awareness of the image of the flame at the eyebrow centre, maintaining the awareness of the physical immobility, silence and space, begin to observe the flow of the natural breath inside the nostrils. (Pause)

At the time of inhalation, feel the breath inside the nostrils, and at the time of exhalation, again feel the breath inside the nostrils. (Pause)

As you inhale, observe and become aware of the gentle, cool sensation of air as it passes through the nostrils and into the lungs. Observe the warmth of the breath as you breathe out. (Pause)

Just focus, just be aware of the sensation of coolness and warmth as you breathe in and out. (Pause)

Now breathe in deeply and chant Om three times with me. Om . . . Om . . . Om . . .

Remain centred within yourself. Do not move the body. Maintain the focus of the image of the flame at the eyebrow centre. (Pause) Experience stillness, silence and peace. (Pause) Just remain aware of the silence, the space, the sensation of peace inside. Absolute stillness of body, absolute stillness of mind. (Pause)

Say to yourself, I am not this body, nor the sensory experiences associated with this body. I am not the mind, nor the experiences of pain and pleasure, desire and desirelessness, comfort and discomfort, associated with the mind. Intensify the awareness of silence. Intensify the awareness of inner peace. Just be one with the state of peace and silence. (Long pause)

Now externalize the mind. Remain still. Remain silent, but become aware of the environment around you. Try to look at the environment around you, keeping your eyes closed. Extend your awareness and your perception to the outer dimensions away from the body, away from the mind. Observe the noise, the

people, the environment, the location where you are, through the eyes of the mind. (Long pause)

Gently rub the palms of the hands together, place them over the closed eyes, and then slowly open your eyes and move the body.

*Hari Om Tat Sat*

We continue with the discovery of the yogic practices in the *Bhagavad Gita* as taught by Sri Krishna to Arjuna. We have spoken about pranayama, about physical and mental stability, and withdrawal of the senses from the outside environment. Now we will look at the other components of yoga, as Krishna described them to Arjuna.

In the *Bhagavad Gita* (5: 27–28), Krishna stated, “Shutting out all thoughts of the external environment, with the gaze fixed on the space between the eyebrows, having regulated the prana and the apana breaths flowing within the nostrils, controlled the senses, mind and intellect, such a contemplative soul intent on liberation and free from desire, fear and anger is liberated.”

### **Chidakasha vidya**

The pratyahara technique Krishna has indicated here is fixing the gaze at the eyebrow centre. Yoga has conceived of three different spaces in the body: the space of the head, the space of the heart and the space of the lower regions. The space of the head is known as *chidakasha*, ‘chit’ plus ‘akasha’. *Akasha* means ‘space’, *chitta* means ‘mind’. When we bring our attention to the eyebrow centre and become aware of the blank space, the void, which we perceive when we close the eyes, it is the experience of *chidakasha*. *Chidakasha* is a subject covered in the practices of *dharana* and *pratyahara*. For calming the mind, *chidakasha dharana*, or *chidakasha vidya*, is one of the important practices of yoga, combining the component of *pratyahara* and the component of *dharana*.

When we observe the world through our senses, the senses retain impressions of the world as sound, colour,

form and image. These are observed and witnessed in chidakasha. So when we close our eyes, we do not become aware of the mind instantaneously. Rather, we begin to observe the experiences of the senses as they occur in chidakasha. Observe the colours that you are able to see manifesting spontaneously in front of the eyes. Observe the shapes and shadows as they manifest in chidakasha. In this way, you eliminate the excess stimulation of the senses which is perceived in the frontal space. As you eradicate the overstimulation of the senses from chidakasha and are able to deepen your awareness, chidakasha dharana begins. In chidakasha dharana you are instructed and guided to create images, to create symbols and to observe them.

### **Ishta devata**

We observe the flame, which is a symbol of light, luminosity. The essential nature of human beings is the spirit. The nature of spirit is light. The desire of every human being at one stage in their life is to experience God, or the nature of God. God by nature is light, luminosity. This light can take a shape, a form, according to one's psychological and cultural conditioning. The shape or form which manifests is known as an *ishta devata*, the image of a deity, whether it is Sri Rama, Sri Krishna, Shiva or Kali, whether it is a feminine force or a masculine force. Among all the different forms of manifestation, the intimacy you feel with one image or form makes it your ishta devata. When the image of ishta devata manifests within the image of light, you create a heart connection with the ishta devata.

### **Hridayakasha vidya**

The second level of practice, awareness of the heart space, is known as hridayakasha vidya. *Hridaya* means 'heart', *akasha* means 'space'. Physically there is no actual space anywhere, but when you begin to observe yourself mentally, you are able to feel the space contained within the body. When the connection with the ishta devata happens, you move beyond the mind and into the heart space, from rationality to feeling,

from intellectual concepts to the experience of closeness with your ishta, closeness with luminosity, *prakasha*, light. When you are able to connect with the space of the heart, then even the emotions and feelings are transformed. Instead of flowing out into the world, they begin to uplift you mentally and spiritually.

### **Chitta vritti**

In the *Yoga Sutras*, the mind is spoken of as being colourless, formless, shapeless. What we experience of the mind is only a manifestation on the surface of the mind, like waves on top of the surface of the ocean. The waves we observe on the surface of the ocean are the *vrittis* or patterns of mind. Each wave is different. Each wave has its own force. Each wave is identified separately. Each wave is a vritti of chidakasha.

People think that chitta vritti is mainly thought, that it is mainly a mental state. People believe chitta vritti to be only a form of psychological behaviour expressing itself, whether in the form of right cognition, false cognition, confusion, memory or absence of vritti. In the *Yoga Sutras*, the vrittis are categorized into five groups. *Pramana vritti* is the faculty of cognition, and all the mental experiences, events and activities that happen due to some form of cognition. You look at a flower and you like the flower. First, cognition has taken place, then association, and attachment follows. Due to this attachment, you either like or dislike something. This is the role of a vritti. But the vrittis are not just subtle mental processes. They become neurological or nervous processes as well.

Chidakasha vidya helps us to overcome the visual vrittis which manifest in our mind in the form of images, memories, colours, shapes, fantasies and desires, each with its own innate quality, its own unique attraction. So chidakasha is the beginning of 'chitta vritti nirodhah'. Fixing the mind in the space between the eyebrows is the first practice of pratyahara. Then, when you are able to overcome the influence of the images which are manifesting spontaneously and naturally, you move into the other areas of the mind by

observing, channelling, guiding and stopping the thoughts. That is known as pratyahara.

### **Antar darshan**

Thoughts represent a logical, linear process of mental activity, but behind this sequential process of thoughts, there is an associated feeling. When we deepen our awareness to the level of the emotions and feelings that are associated with the thoughts, but of which we are not normally aware as they are so subtle, this observation of the emotional association with the thought is known as the practice of antar darshan.

When we are able to calm, still, focus and concentrate the mind, we then move into the heart space. It is in the heart space where a connection is created between the individual being and its cosmic representation. The cosmic representation of every individual being is God, ishta, and this is the beginning of the meditative process as it has been defined and explained by Sri Krishna.

### **Living in seclusion – udasinata**

At the same time, Krishna also speaks of asana. He says that a person who desires to attain inner balance, a person who desires to attain inner realization or God-realization, must live in seclusion. What does this mean? Where can we find seclusion in the world? Generally we associate seclusion with shunning society and going to live in the mountains, in a cave, in the forest, in absolute isolation. But isolation is not seclusion. The concept of seclusion is expressed in the *Bhagavad Gita* (6:9) by the word 'udasina'. The word *udasina* literally means 'having no interest at all'. Because of our highly developed intellect, we think of seclusion as external, social, physical. But *udasina* really means not being attached to the senses that are craving for fulfilment. It is not rejection but observation of your association with life that is involved.

Imagine I am your friend and we live in the same town. I have to go away for some time and so I ask you to look after my electronic gadgets. You agree to keep them in safe custody. As long as you know they belong to somebody else, you will

not be possessive about them. That is *udasinata*. But the moment you know that they belong to you, you will become possessive. That is *asakti*, attachment.

Udasinata, or living in seclusion, means that you develop the attitude of a caretaker. When you feel that you are only a caretaker of an item, you will be careful to ensure that it is maintained properly. If somebody else uses it, you will interfere and tell them not to misuse it as it is not yours, but has been entrusted to your care. The same attitude can be adopted in life. After all, you have a body that you call your own and you use it, abuse it and misuse it. You have a mind you call your own and you use it, abuse it and misuse it. Your entire life passes by abusing and misusing what you have received as an endowment, as a gift.

You were born with a free mind, not a conditioned mind, yet at the time of departure you are returning a sick mind. Why have you never thought that what you have received is a gift which you need to return in better condition when it is asked for? Udasinata means that you begin to look at yourself from a different perspective and begin to care for yourself. Use what you have to the best of your ability, without abusing and misusing it. If you think of seclusion in this way, you will begin to understand the phrase which has been the trademark of Swami Satyananda's efforts and life: "There is no peace in the Himalayas and there is no noise in the world. It all exists within your own mind."

Whatever exists is within you. If you have an unbalanced mind, you will never find peace in the Himalayas, but if you have a balanced mind, then even the chaos and noise of the Bombay market will not affect you. This indicates that there is a process of learning how to use the qualities you have received in this human birth; it indicates how to use and not misuse your faculties. So seclusion is a mental attitude. It is not a physical act of leaving everything behind and isolating yourself from responsibilities, isolating yourself from the influences of the body. Live in the world, be of the world, but maintain your inner equilibrium. This is the concept of *udasinata*. Udasinata is not rejection.

## Desha and kala – place and time of sadhana

Sri Krishna further says (*Bhagavad Gita*, 6:11–12),

*Shuchau deshe pratishthaapya sthiramaasanamaatmanah  
Naatyuchchhritam naatineecham chailaajinakushottaram.  
Tatraikaagram manah kritvaa yatachittendriyakriyah  
Upavishyaasane yunjaadyogamaatmavishuddhaye.*

In a spot which is free from dirt and other impurities, firmly establish a seat of cloth, deerskin and kusha grass, and occupy that seat. Concentrate the mind and, controlling the functions of the mind and senses, practise yoga for self-purification.

Notice he does not say to practise yoga for emancipation, but for self-purification.

Krishna continues (*Bhagavad Gita*, 6:13),

*Samam kaayashirogreevam dhaarayannachalam sthirah  
Samprekshya naasikaagram svam dishashchaanavalokayan.*

Holding the head, neck and trunk straight and steady, remain firm and fix the gaze at the tip of the nose without looking around.

Fixing the place, the space where we are going to be, is important. Yoga speaks of *desha* and *kala*, ‘place’ and ‘time’. *Desha* is the place where you build up the energy. Krishna is talking about the same thing here. The place where you intend to control yourself should be free from the dirt and impurities that bind the mind. There is a place for everything. You do not sleep in your kitchen, or cook in your bedroom. Just as in your own small house, you have identified different areas for sleeping, cooking, washing, socializing, etc., in the same way, you have to identify an area where you can go within yourself, because when you are practising a spiritual sadhana, you are creating an energy field around you. That aura remains in the place where you do sadhana. You build up that energy field constantly every time you practise sadhana there.

Therefore, in the ancient vedic tradition it is said, “Do not think ill of anybody in a place of worship.” When you go to a place of worship, be pious in your thoughts, actions and behaviour. Why? So you maintain your connection with the energy that is vibrant in that place. Otherwise you can go to a temple, to a place of worship and bow your head there, yet your attention is not on what you are doing. Your attention is fixed on your shoes, hoping that nobody will remove them while you are bowing down before the image. Why then do you bow your head before the image of God? Bow to your shoes where your attention is fixed. If your shoes are your God, do your pooja to them.

If you go to a place of worship, live according to the sanctity of the place. If you create a place of sadhana in your own environment, in your own home, then even there you have to maintain the sanctity of that sadhana place. Do not think of doing two things at once. While you are sitting on the toilet, do not try to meditate. Do one thing at a time. This is the concept of desha and kala.

A beautiful example is given in the book *Stalking the Wild Pendulum* by the scientist Itzhak Bentov, who says that there is dormant consciousness in a stone lying on the road. The moment you pick up the stone, you are creating a connection with it. The moment you bring that stone into your home and put it in the place of worship, you are offering your energy, your vibrancy, to the consciousness that is dormant in the stone. If you continue to worship that stone, there will come a time when the consciousness in the stone will become alive, will wake up, will become vibrant, and be as powerful as your consciousness.

We have the concept of prana pratishtha. *Prana pratishtha* is awakening the vital force within an object through your association of faith, belief and action. So when we talk of desha, of a specific place for your efforts, we are referring to the creation of energy, an aura field around that place where you involve yourself in inner pursuits.

Then there is time, *kala*. In your life, you follow a specific routine: a time to sleep, a time to eat, a time to work, a time



to be free; our routine is divided up in time. So when it comes to spiritual efforts, why do people think, “I can do it any time, morning, afternoon, evening, night, whenever I am free?” Do you sleep whenever you are free? No, you will wait for the appropriate time to sleep and pass your time in other ways. You will wait for the right time to eat a meal. Prior to that you might take a snack if you feel very hungry, but the meal will be taken at the right time. Similarly, the sadhana one has to do must follow a fixed time, because through conditioning of the body, mind and psyche, you are able to create a biorhythm within yourself that is conducive to your development and growth. At that time, your whole perception will be geared to experiencing what you are practising.

### Asana

Sri Krishna then says (*Bhagavad Gita*, 6:13), “Holding the trunk, head and neck straight and steady, remain firm.” In Sage Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras* (2:46), the definition of asana is ‘*Sthiram sukham asanam*’. Asana is a physical posture in which you are *sthira*, still, stable or steady, in which you experience *sukha*, comfort. The concept of asana conveyed by Sage Patanjali is having control over the physical body and ensuring it is comfortable and stable, and there is no distraction, no pain. Once the body becomes still, it is easier to still the mind. When the body is still, it simply implies that the senses have also become still. But if the body is moving, then the senses are moving. Therefore, in raja yoga, the psychological dimension of yoga, asana means being able to hold a steady posture.

The steady postures which are used for introspection, introversion, sadhana and meditation are: *sukhasana* (easy pose), *padmasana*, (lotus pose), *siddhasana* (adept’s pose), *vajrasana* (thunderbolt pose), etc. There are about twelve asanas used in meditation. These asanas also help to realign the flow of prana shakti in the body.

Sometimes people ask, “If Sage Patanjali has said that asanas are *sthiram*, steady, and *sukham*, comfortable, then from where did the dynamic postures, such as *surya*

namaskara, come into the yogic tradition?” Those people miss the point that the dynamic asanas which help to prepare the body and awaken the energies in preparation for static asanas belong to hatha yoga. In the yogic tradition, it has been said very clearly that you must first perfect hatha yoga to detoxify yourself and remove the impurities from the body. The toxins are the three *doshas* or impurities: *vata*, wind, *pitta*, acidity, and *kapha*, phlegm. The reason for beginning our yogic practice with the hatha yoga shatkriyas is to eliminate toxins and re-balance the body. In our physical nature one dosha is predominant all the time. The purpose of hatha yoga is to balance these imbalances which disturb the peace and ease of the body.

### **Hatha prepares for raja yoga**

The next purpose of hatha yoga is to open the channels or conductors of the pranic force. Clearing of the nadis happens through the practice of dynamic postures. It also happens with the practice of mudras. The blocks from the psychic centres are removed with the practice of bandhas. Only when hatha yoga has been perfected does yoga give instructions to move into the next dimension of yoga, which is raja yoga. So first perfect hatha yoga, then move into raja yoga. Then you will understand that after the dynamic and involved activities of hatha yoga, the practices of raja yoga are static and induce a state of awareness, relaxation, concentration and meditation.

Perfect hatha yoga first. Do all the dynamic activities that you need to do. Hatha yoga represents the dimension of body, and raja yoga represents the dimension of mind. Believing that the aspirant would have completed the practice of hatha yoga before coming to raja yoga, Sage Patanjali simply defined asana as a static pose in which the body is comfortable and still.

When this asana is adopted, Sage Patanjali has simply said that pranayama is inhalation, exhalation and retention. That is because it is known that in order to attain this level of raja yoga pranayama practice, you will have already done the

hatha yoga breathing exercises, such as kapalbhati. Although we identify kapalbhati as one practice of pranayama, here the word kapalbhati means the combination of the different hatha yoga breathing techniques that awaken and purify the vital force within. Once the vital force is purified and the nadis are clear, the chakra blockages are removed. Then the final pranayama is only receiving the vital energy through inhalation, exhalation of the vital force, and stability of the vital force known as kumbhaka. Without this attainment, meditation cannot begin. Sage Patanjali, in only eight sutras, has completed the entire definition of asana and pranayama. The rest he has devoted to the states of mind, the practices of pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, and how to experience the deepening states of consciousness in samadhi.

### **Kundalini yoga in the Bhagavad Gita**

Once you have perfected raja yoga, and have come to a point where meditation is spontaneous, the third level of perfection, the third level of sadhana, is kundalini yoga. The sequence is: hatha yoga, raja yoga and kundalini yoga, which represent complete yoga. Kundalini yoga is the awakening and raising of the primal force from where it is lying dormant, so that you are able to transform and transcend the gross states of consciousness and ultimately experience the expansive nature of the self, where kundalini unites with Shiva in sahasrara. Never think of raja yoga as being the final definition of yoga. It is only one component of yoga.

Krishna says (*Bhagavad Gita*, 6:13), “Hold the trunk, head and neck straight and steady, remain firm and fix the gaze on the tip of the nose, without looking in any other direction.” Here an indication is given of the practice of kundalini yoga, because fixing the gaze at the tip of the nose is *nasikagra drishti*. In kundalini yoga it is said that by focusing on the nose tip, you are awakening mooladhara chakra.

There are two ways of awakening the kundalini shakti. One is to work at the level of mooladhara chakra through mantras, yantras, bandhas and different kriyas. The other method used to ensure that kundalini rises is nasikagra drishti, gazing at

the tip of the nose. When the eyes focus there, the tension created in the nerves actually stimulates and influences ida and pingala nadis.

You can try an experiment. Sit up straight, close your eyes, relax and still the body. After a few moments of stillness, open your eyes. Do not look around. Simply try to focus the eyesight on the tip of the nose, try to see the tip of the nose. As you observe the tip of the nose also feel the pressure that is being generated in the eyes and the nerves of the eyes. Just keep on gazing at the tip of the nose for a few minutes. When your eyes feel tired, again close the eyes.

Observe the state of your physical body. What are you feeling? What sensations are you having? You will notice that you feel a different kind of sensation. You will feel relaxed. You will feel the tensions leaving the eyes and you will feel the energy moving in the body. If, after five minutes of practising nasikagra drishti, you can feel this much, imagine what would happen if you practised nasikagra drishti every day for fifteen minutes for one or two or three months. You would be able to experience the awakening of prana shakti in your psychic centres.

### **Kundalini yoga is not for everyone**

We are not teaching you how to awaken your kundalini, because we believe that your kundalini should not be awakened. At least, kundalini should not awaken in those people who are still engrossed and involved in worldly activities, otherwise there will be a major accident. Our mind is like a monkey, and if we give it the sword of kundalini, it will kill us. Therefore, it is wrong to teach kundalini yoga and kriya yoga to people who do not have equipoise, who are not balanced or in harmony with themselves. Of course, everybody wants to learn it. The student thinks, "If I awaken my kundalini, I can get good marks without having to study." The businessman thinks, "If I awaken my kundalini, I will get some siddhis, and then I can hypnotize other people and sell them my product." This is the mentality and it wants to have the power of kundalini in its hands! So do not think

that this simple practice of nasikagra drishti will awaken your kundalini. When you can gaze at the nose tip, the focusing of the eyes and the stretch and pull of the optical nerves will help relax the active brain.

You can try the following experiment with a person who is hyperactive. Ask them to sit down in a corner and simply look at the nose tip. After five to ten minutes, depending on how much their eyes move here and there, and if they are sincere with the practice, their hyperactivity will have reduced. They will feel calmer and more relaxed and so the stimulation in the brain will also be relaxed. Stimulation of ida and pingala nadis takes place with the practice of nasikagra drishti. There is *spandan*, spontaneous vibration, in mooladhara chakra. So, here we can see the gradual progression from hatha yoga to raja yoga to kundalini yoga.

### **The Yoga Sutras and the Gita Sutras**

How much can be said on the battlefield when the armies are just waiting to kill each other? Sri Krishna is not going to give a philosophical discourse. He has to say something short and be brief. Therefore, he spoke in sutras or formulas. Similarly, Sage Patanjali in his exposition of yoga gave us the *Yoga Sutras*. We are able to interpret the formulas he has left us because we have experienced them in our own sadhana, through our own effort.

Those who believe the sutras to be only an intellectual concept, who believe them to be the final statement of Sage Patanjali, or who believe the sutras of the *Bhagavad Gita* to be the final statement of Sri Krishna, must realize that sutras are formulas indicating a process of growth and attainment. The sequence of developing in that path will involve the use of different techniques and practices, attitudes and ideas, thoughts and lifestyles as well. So when people say, “It says this in the *Yoga Sutras*, it says that in the *Bhagavad Gita*,” we say they may be right, but it is our innermost wish that before trying to interpret the sutras intellectually, you experience what they say practically first and then interpret, not before.

## Yama and niyama

Sri Krishna then says (*Bhagavad Gita*, 6:14),

*Prashaantaatmaa vigatabheerbrahmachaarivrate sthitah  
Manah samyamya machchitto yukta aaseeta matparah.*

Firm in the vow of chastity, fearless, serene, and with the mind also held in restraint, the spiritual aspirant should absorb the self in me.

Here Krishna is referring to the yamas and niyamas of yoga. Please remember that although Sage Patanjali placed the yamas and niyamas as the first and second stages of yoga, in our society today they do not represent the first and second stages. When Sage Patanjali wrote the *Yoga Sutras*, society was different with a different thought culture, work culture and social environment. The priorities of life were different. Our priority in life is to accumulate as many objects of pleasure as we can. In Sage Patanjali's time, the priority was not accumulation; it was to live in harmony with nature and the cosmos.

If you analyze the history of the period when Sage Patanjali lived, you will understand the relevance of placing the yamas and niyamas as the first and second stages of yoga. However, in today's environment, asana and pranayama are the first and second stages of yoga. Pratyahara and dharana are the third and fourth stages. The yamas and niyamas are the fifth and sixth stages. After you have perfected yama and niyama, then begins meditation, *dhyana*, the seventh stage of yoga, leading to samadhi, the eighth stage. So we place the yamas and niyamas as the fifth and sixth *angas* or limbs of yoga, because if the mind is not balanced, how are you going to practise them?

How many times have we been told to speak the truth, *satya*, yet are we truthful? We are not even truthful to ourselves, so how can we be truthful to others. Is *himsa*, violence, absent from our nature? No. Ill will and negative, restricting thoughts are predominant in our personality. Unless we try to centre and focus our mind, we cannot cultivate good qualities in life.

The purpose of yoga is not to become a warrior, because the moment that concept arises in your mind, you think in terms of victory and defeat. The moment you think in terms of victory and defeat, you are misunderstanding the whole process of spiritual thought, because in spirituality there is no defeat and there is no victory. So, instead of being a warrior, be a farmer, and learn to nurture and take care.

A farmer plants a seed and ensures that the environment is appropriate for the growth of the seed. That is what we have to do. Leave the outcome, because we have no control over it. We have no control over the seed's growth, but we can definitely ensure that the environment is right. Therefore, be a farmer, not a warrior. Learn to nurture and to care, and begin that process with yourself, with your personality and with your mind.

### **Brahmacharya**

Chastity is a confusing word. Brahmacharya is the fifth yama, after satya, ahimsa, asteya and aparigraha. The person who has an overall picture, who has insight, who understands the interactions in life and is able to devote those interactions to self-development, a person who is able to dedicate those actions to God, is known as a *brahmachari*. When you become a brahmachari, the centre of focus is the transcendental reality. When you are not a brahmachari, the centre of focus is the sense object. Then you seek fulfilment from the sense objects and become more and more involved and engrossed in them, thus disturbing the equilibrium of your mind, of your inner self. Brahmacharya is maintaining a vision of the transcendental reality, not losing it in the personal reality.

### **The drashta**

“Being firm in the vow of brahmacharya, fearless, keeping oneself perfectly calm and with the mind held in restraint” refers to the vigilant yogi, the drashta yogi. The vigilant yogi is the drashta of Sage Patanjali – *Tada drashtuh swaroopē’vasthanam* (*Yoga Sutras*, 1:3). Drashta is the mind

becoming aware of itself, the consciousness becoming aware of itself, the senses becoming aware of themselves. There is no absence of awareness; awareness guides and controls the activity of the senses, the activity of the mind and the effort of the individual sadhaka. The *drashta*, the observer, the seer, the witness, is the vigilant yogi. You cannot allow yourself to go to sleep. You have to be alert and aware all the time.

The final statement is (*Bhagavad Gita*, 6:15):

*Yunjannevam sadaa'tmaanam yogee niyatamaanasah  
Shaantim nirvaanaparamaam matsamsthaamadhigachchhati.*

Thus constantly fixing the mind on me, the transcendental nature, the yogi with a disciplined mind attains everlasting bliss.



# Moving Towards Sattwa

## Practical Aspects of the Bhagavad Gita (Part 5)

We have seen that the teaching of yoga described in the *Bhagavad Gita* conveys the same ideas and concepts as the *Yoga Sutras* of Sage Patanjali. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, we have seen the progression in the systems and methods of yoga, starting with yama, going up to dhyana, and then coming back to yama.

In the martial arts there is a rule that you start with a white belt and then progress through different colours until you reach the black belt, but once you have attained the black belt and have become the master of the black belt, you revert back to white. White is the beginning and white is the end. In yoga, too, yama and niyama are the beginning and then, after samadhi, they are the attainment as well. How is that possible? Why does it happen?

### **Yama and niyama**

In the first part of yama, or in the beginning of yogic sadhana, you experiment with techniques and systems. You realize your own mental expressions and harmonize them. In the beginning you try to cultivate the qualities of *ahimsa*, the non-violent nature. That is a sadhana. You try to cultivate the quality of *shaucha*, physical and mental purity, external and internal purity. In the beginning you try to cultivate *santosha*, contentment, satisfaction, by trying to understand, “This is how I can be free from tensions. This is how I can be more satisfied in life. This is how I can be more creative and more

responsible for my creativity.” You practise the yamas and niyamas in this manner.

The initial purpose of the yamas and niyamas is a gradual training of the mind, so that we are able to transform our attitudes and perceptions. It is the same with asana. The postures are perfected, but the aim is not to attain physical perfection, but rather to allow the physical perfection to influence the mind. Through the practice of asanas we are not looking for physical harmony, but trying to experience the physical harmony inside the mind.

### **Dhyana and samadhi**

It is the same with pranayama, with pratyahara, with dharana and with dhyana. But once dhyana is perfected and we begin to experience the states of samadhi, we begin to hold together the qualities of life. Holding together the qualities of life gives birth to an enlightened state of being. The word samadhi is composed of *sam*, meaning ‘balance’, and *dhi*, meaning ‘to hold together’. The ‘dhi’ of the Gayatri mantra means ‘to hold together’; it also means knowledge, wisdom and perception, the expression of wisdom in life. So samadhi is an extension of dhyana.

We will discuss the process of dhyana, the attainment of samadhi, and how we revert back to implementation of the yamas and niyamas in our life. Meditation or *dhyana* is a concept and a practice that attracts many people. Dhyana is generally believed to be a practice in which we become engrossed. We get lost in the object of contemplation. It is believed to be a practice in which the mind is in union, in tune, in harmony with the object of contemplation.

### **Three components of meditation**

Swami Satyananda says that there are three components of meditation. The first is the meditator. The second is the process or practice of meditation, the method of meditation. The third is the aim, the goal or object of meditation. In the beginning, when we start our training in meditative states, we are aware of all three components independently of each

other. I am aware of myself. I am sitting down. I have my body, my aspirations and motivation. 'I' as a person, 'I' as an individual identity, am separate from the process and aim of dhyana. The process of meditation is what we choose to practise. The aim of meditation is the attainment after having perfected the practice.

Later on, as you progress in meditation, the practice becomes part of your nature. Only two things remain: I (the meditator), and the object of meditation. As we deepen our understanding of the meditative states of mind, as we go deeper into our own psyche, as we are able to manage the influences of *raga* and *dvesha*, attraction and repulsion, pleasure and pain, we are only aware of one thing: the goal of meditation. At that point, even the 'I' dissolves. The 'I' merges with the object of contemplation. But please remember that it is not so easy to merge with the object of contemplation and yet maintain clarity of intellect, *buddhi*. To maintain clarity of realization is very difficult. It is not an easy process.

### **Arrogance of the intellect**

Once an aspirant came to a guru and said, "Master, I seek enlightenment. I hear that you have many siddhis and through your grace, through your will, it may be possible that I too become realized. Please bless me." The master replied, "You are not ready for realization yet. Just live in the ashram for some time." The man said, "I cannot live in the ashram for an extended period of time away from my family, friends and society. I only have fifteen days and I want to achieve the highest pinnacle of spiritual life in that time." The guru replied, "Impossible. In many cases even fifteen lifetimes are not enough!"

The man was very stubborn and gurus are gentle. The man's stubbornness eventually won and the guru said, "I'll give you a mantra. If you are able to perfect it, you will be realized." The disciple sat down in his room and started repeating the mantra with full devotion, dedication and concentration. Surprise of surprises, the effect of the mantra

was such that in a few days time the aspirant began to see the luminosity in each and every object perceived through his senses. The meditation was so deep and so intense that within fifteen days the disciple, with eyes open or closed, felt the presence of luminosity in everything.

On the fourteenth day, the guru called the aspirant, gave him a bag and some money, and told him to go to the market and buy some vegetables. The disciple could not perceive the hidden meaning behind the guru's words. He took the bag and the money and went to the market. There he saw that everybody was running away as if demons were after them. So he stopped someone and asked why everybody was running away. The person told him that a mad elephant was on the rampage and that if he valued his life, he had better run away too.

The disciple thought to himself, "Well, I am able to perceive the inner nature of everything. If I look at a leaf, I see the luminosity of God in the leaf. If I look at a stone, I see the light of God there. If I look at a dog, I see the divine nature manifesting. If I look at a person, I see the divine nature within. I am sure that the elephant is also an expression of that same luminosity. If I am Brahman, the elephant is also Brahman. The whole world is Brahman, the transcendental consciousness. How then can one Brahman harm another Brahman?"

The logic was very simple. When you pour a bucket of water in a lake, they become one, and each one loses its identity and merges into the other. But the aspirant forgot that the identity can only be lost in something which is greater than one's self. He continued on his journey to the centre of the market and encountered the mad elephant. The elephant had no guru, had not practised any mantra and had no concept of realization at all. So what happened? The elephant picked up the man in its trunk and dashed him to the ground, not once but many times.

This enlightened aspirant ended up in hospital. He returned to the ashram in plaster, abusing the guru left, right and centre. The guru asked him what had happened. The disciple answered, "You know, what can I tell you? I was

God-intoxicated. I was seeing God in everything.” The guru said, “Yes, you saw God in everything, but you failed to see God in the person who came to warn you to get out of the way of the mad elephant!”

This is only a story. Our realization can be very deep, subtle and sublime, but unless we learn to manage our intellect, the realization will always be clouded by the arrogance of the intellect. This arrogance is seen in our behaviour, in our attitude, even in our day-to-day life. People who believe themselves to be intellectuals, prosperous and well-off tend to look down on other people who are not intelligent, who are struggling. They develop the concept of superiority and believe that everyone is inferior to them.

This is a reflection of their pride, *abhimana*. Unfortunately, in spiritual life it is this pride that the aspirant has to manage, because it is the last bond in this manifest world, the last grip of prakriti before the spirit is allowed to be free. A kite can fly in the air, but it is controlled by a string; it is not free. Similarly, realization can happen in the life of an individual, but the thin thread of ego does not allow free flight. It holds you back.

## **Samadhi**

In yoga, it is said that after having gone through the progressive states of samadhi, the last one is *asmita samadhi*, dissolution of the personal ego. After *asmita samadhi* is attained, after the ego is dissolved, then *ananda samadhi*, the state of absolute bliss, is experienced. So when we practise meditation, and when we merge our mind with the object of contemplation and there is no awareness of duality, that is samadhi. Samadhi means holding together human wisdom. Samadhi is holding together the human qualities that lead you to the experience of transcendence. It is a very beautiful concept, holding together the beauty, holding together the good in order to experience freedom, moksha.

## **Swing of the gunas**

It has been stated in the *Bhagavad Gita* (14:11–13) that the quality of tamas leads one to darkness, the quality of rajas

propels one to action and the quality of sattwa illuminates the being. In our life, we move between tamas and rajas, rajas and tamas – from sloth, inactivity and infatuation, to action, motivation and fulfilment of desire, then back to tamas, then back to rajas. There are very few times when sattwa actually manifests, but when it does, the negative qualities disappear. The negative personality traits dissolve and the good, pious traits become the predominant qualities in life.

Sattwa represents the positive, luminous qualities of life. Luminosity, the effulgence of light, the effulgence of sattwa is the beginning of the samadhi experience. As sattwa becomes more and more powerful, it detaches you from the sense objects, from the interaction of ego, and you begin to experience freedom, *svatantratva*. The moment final freedom is achieved, the body dissolves into the cosmos. That is *moksha*, the fulfilment, the last attainment of life. Beyond that there is nothing more to achieve in this life. You become light. When you become light, your expressions and actions also become light, full of sattwic qualities.

### **Living sattwa**

It is sattwa that ultimately cuts the thread of *ahamkara*, ego. Once the ego is cut, sattwic qualities manifest naturally and spontaneously in your life. Satya or truth manifests. Then you do not have to hide behind a mask. Rather you begin to live in satya. Your thoughts are satya, your performance is satya, your behaviour is satya. You begin to live ahimsa; there is absolute absence of violence from your personality. There are many examples to indicate this attainment and lifestyle. Buddha attained and lived the lifestyle of sattwa, as an enlightened being. He was known as *Bodhisattwa*, one who has luminosity of consciousness, luminosity of wisdom. The same expression of the positive qualities is seen in the life of Lord Mahavir. When sattwa becomes the predominant nature, then the yamas (satya, ahimsa, asteya, aparigraha and brahmacharya) are lived and the niyamas (shaucha, santosha, swadhyaya, tapas and ishwara pranidhana) are lived.

What are the symptoms of a person who has attained *sattwa*? This has been explained in the twelfth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*, known as *bhakti yoga*. *Bhakti yoga* is not the yoga of devotion; it is the yoga of emotional management, just as *raja yoga* is the yoga of mind management. It is not to make you more faithful and devoted to your belief or to your concepts and ideas of God. Rather it is to enable you to manage effectively and efficiently the highs and lows of the normal emotions we experience in our life.

### **The three quotients**

People are always thinking about IQ, the intellectual quotient. There are people with high IQs who are absolute failures in their personal and social lives, because IQ is not the only factor in life. There is also the EQ, the emotional quotient, and the SQ, the social quotient. A harmonious personality is one in which the intellectual, emotional, and social dimensions are in balance.

It is something you should think about, because when we think of spiritual life and spiritual practices, we tend to ignore our social life and our emotional life, and try to work with our intellectual mind. This is the reason why, despite a very solid foundation of spiritual traditions in India, we have missed our destination. Spiritual traditions have become spiritual clubs. You belong to one spiritual club, somebody else belongs to another. We live in a society of clubs, without any awareness of how we can use the inner wisdom of our tradition to improve the quality of life.

The emotional, social and intellectual quotients are three important factors in our life. *Jnana* is wisdom, not knowledge, because knowledge can lead to confusion but wisdom leads to light. Wisdom is applied knowledge. *Jnana*, wisdom, is for IQ development. *Bhakti*, emotional management, is for EQ development. *Karma*, the behaviour, the attitude, the creative, harmonious expression of the senses in outer life, leads to SQ, development of the social quotient.

## **Bhakti yoga**

Bhakti is not devotion. Bhakti is the right management of the emotions. The meaning of emotion is ‘e-motion’, ‘e’ plus ‘motion’, energy in motion. The feeling of anger is a specific form of energy in motion. Fear is a specific form of energy, inducing a specific state of mind – energy in motion. The energy in motion which is manifesting in your personality and creating a mood, an attitude, a perception is emotion. The management of this hyperactivity of energy in motion is the purpose of bhakti yoga.

Bhakti yoga teaches us to begin with appreciation of our self, *atmabhava*. Through appreciation of our self, we begin to appreciate existence, the role of the cosmic power and its effect on us. A human being is linked with the cosmos. The link is energy, *shakti*. Becoming aware of the inner link of shakti leads us to realization of God as the generating principle, the organizing or sustaining principle, and the transforming principle. Generation, Organization and Destruction (G-O-D) is God. This is the concept of the trinity. They are not three different people, but the expression of the same quality manifesting in three different ways. It is this link which we realize when we attain the state of dhyana and the effulgence of samadhi. The real connection is with the principle of Godhood.

According to the emotional input we have received and which is ingrained in our nature, we perceive the transcendental reality in one specific form, in the form of ishta devata. Identification with ishta devata is known as God-realization. But remember it is not identification with a form, a name and a quality, but with the eternal light that is in all names, forms and qualities. This is the concept of God-realization.

## **Qualities of a bhakta**

Prior to the attainment of realization, the expressions of the human personality are seen in a very different way. Sri Krishna has described the qualities inherent in a bhakta in the twelfth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Verses 13–20 describe



the positive qualities. Verse 18 states, “See both friend and enemy with equal vision.” How do you see and respect the enemy as a friend? This can only happen when ahimsa has been experienced. If ahimsa is not realized, then an enemy will always be an enemy. But if you have experienced absence of violence from your nature, if you have attained ahimsa, then you can see that the statement of these verses is appropriate. You can see friend and foe, pain and pleasure, on an equal footing. There is no attraction and no repulsion, both are seen as experiences that are continuously changing and transforming.

We are very affected by recognition and abuse. We are so influenced by abuse that it shatters our peace of mind. Abuse evokes hatred, jealousy, anger and frustration. This shows that there is a form of violence in us, and that we are hiding from the truth. *Samatvam yoga uchayate* – equilibrium is yoga, indicates that we begin to live positive qualities, we begin to impress the positive qualities in our life without imposing ourselves on people, situations or circumstances. This is what needs to be learnt – how to move from tamas to rajas to sattwa. This is the teaching of the *Bhagavad Gita* and the teaching of yoga. Therefore, the *Bhagavad Gita* is recognized as a yoga shastra.

### **Gita – a yoga shastra**

Each chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita* is recognized as one branch of yoga, even the first chapter on vishad yoga. Why vishad yoga? *Vishad* means anxiety, depression, pain and suffering. But vishad yoga does not mean the yoga of suffering, or union in suffering. Vishad yoga is the opening into the dimension of yoga. When you are happy, you think, “Yoga is not for me.” But when you are suffering and you have tried everything, there is motivation, and you say, “OK, let me try yoga also.” Suffering is the motivation to experience goodness and auspiciousness in life, and therefore suffering leads to yoga. That is vishad yoga.

Suffering leads to the effort to overcome the suffering. It is the first step of yoga. It is only when you are tense or

sick, when you have no other option in life, that you come to yoga. Imagine what would have happened if you had come to yoga before you underwent all the crises in your life. Your life would be different today. Coming to yoga for solutions in times of crisis is our mentality, and then developing the concept of self, and finally recognizing, “I am not the master, I am not the controller of my actions” comes when you have gone through the entire process of yoga.

Once you have seen the futility and the achievements of your life, a specific mentality develops and you begin to think, “Let me perform my duties, my actions, without any expectation, without any desire.” You realize that expectation leads to bondage, to cravings, and they become the cause of suffering. So even the attachment with karma goes away.

It has been stated in the *Bhagavad Gita* (2:47),

*Karmanyevaadhikaraste ma phaleshu kadaachana  
Maa karmaphalaheturbhoomaa te sango'stvakarmani.*

Your right is to work only, but never to its fruits; do not let the fruits of action be your motive, nor let your attachment be to inaction.

This is the final expression of yoga. After having realized that harmony and balance, then that attitude begins to alter your perceptions and your participation in life. You are not the ‘doer’ then. Initially, you felt you were the doer, ‘you’ were the focus of attention, but once the selfishness, the *tamas* and *rajas*, are not the focus of attention, *sattwa* is the focus of attention. Once selfless qualities are the focus of attention, then transcendence is also the focus of attention. This is the concept of *poornata* or completeness in the *Bhagavad Gita*.

# The Journey of Yoga

Fine Arts Cultural Centre, Chembur, February 10, 2001

Traditionally, we begin our discussion on yoga by remembering Maheshwara, Shiva, for he epitomizes the yogic tradition, the tradition of sciences leading to the development of the human personality. There have been two main streams of Indian thought. The stream that taught philosophy is the tradition of Vishnu. The stream that taught the sciences for spiritual awakening is the tradition of Shiva. If you look at the life of Shiva, you will understand how yoga is to be experienced.

## **Tantra and yoga**

The Mother goddess Parvati, at different times, asked Lord Shiva the method by which one can overcome suffering. The method for attaining freedom was described by Maheshwara in the form of the tantras and yogas. The entire system of the tantras and yogas is realization of the potential and the qualities of life.

Tantra and yoga are synonymous. The word *tantra* means expansion and liberation, from 'tanoti' and 'trayati'. *Tanoti* means expansion of human consciousness, development of the human mind, the awakening of awareness that expands the conscious, subconscious and causal realms of experience. *Trayati* means liberation of energy, *shakti*, the vital force we experience in the form of physical, mental, intellectual and emotional activity, vitality, movement and dynamism. Liberation of this pranic energy, expansion of human percep-

tion, and the adaptation of consciousness and energy in life is the purpose of tantra. Tantra is composed of mantras, yantras, rituals and also yoga. The parent of yoga is tantra. The philosophies of yoga and tantra are compatible with each other, as with practice their ideas come alive in the minds of individuals.

### **The world of Shiva**

Many people believe that Shiva is a person who is constantly in samadhi, remembering his ishta devata. We believe that Shiva is always meditating and has renounced the world. But Shiva's life is a paradox. You may see him sitting in deep meditation, engrossed in the transformation of human nature and the world. However, if you observe his life, you will find that it is full of conflict and duality, but in that conflict and duality he remains stable within himself.

In Shiva's household each member of his family is just waiting for an opportunity to consume the other members of the family. The *vahana*, or vehicle, of Shakti, the lion, is always eyeing the vehicle of Shiva, the bull. The vehicle of Kartikeya, the peacock, is always eyeing the ornaments of Shiva, the snakes. The snakes are always waiting for an opportunity to make a juicy meal out of the vehicle of Ganesha, the mouse. At Shiva's throat lies poison, while on his head is Ganga, representing purity. When the two eyes of Shiva are open, they see the world of duality, but when the two eyes close and the third eye opens, then duality is burnt away, and only the experience of oneness, unity, remains.

The Mother goddess, Parvati, enjoys the beauty of life, wearing ornaments of flowers, gold and other symbols of prosperity, whereas Shiva smears his body with ashes, representing death. If you had to be part of such a family, imagine what your state of mind would be. Imagine what kind of effort Shiva needs to make to maintain his own balance amidst so much tension and confusion. We become tense and depressed by the problems of even one person in our family, because our mind, our consciousness and our perceptions are totally self-confined.

## **Yoga – an integrated system**

It has been stated, not only in the scriptures, but also by different saints throughout the ages that the aim and effort of human life is to convert the gross mind into a transcendental mind. Once transcendence is achieved, the beauty and harmony of life begins to express itself, leading to the experience of bliss and peace, *ananda* and *shanti*.

We think of yoga as a series of physical exercises leading to health and vitality, or as a sequence of meditative practices leading to mental balance and inner peace. Sometimes we think of yoga as a *purushartha* or as spiritual enlightenment leading to *moksha*. We have compartmentalized the achievements of yoga into different groups – physical, psychological and spiritual. However, it needs to be remembered that the achievements and practices of yoga cannot be compartmentalized.

The human personality is an integrated personality. In this personality we find the expression of the senses, mind and emotions. We find the expression of the dynamic force, the creative principle, *kriya shakti*. We also find the expression of what our paramguru, Swami Sivananda, called *atma vichara*, self-reflection. The association of our nature with the outer bond of the senses creates confusion, conflict, disease and death.

The scriptures say that we have to face three realities in life. After birth we are subject to *vyadhi*, disease, to *jara*, old age, and eventually to *mrityun*, death or departure from one dimension of life into another. Yoga has attempted to show how we can manage these three states.

## **Essence of health**

Vyadhi is disease. When your body is at ease with itself, there is physical harmony, balance and health. Health is not only physical, but also psychological, moral, intellectual and spiritual. This is the modern concept of health according to the World Health Organization. It is also the most ancient concept of health according to Indian thought. Healing means rectifying, curing or eradicating. The word for

health in the Indian system of thought is *swasthya*, which means, not the process of healing or finding one's balance, but becoming established in oneself. *Swa* and *sta* mean to become self-contained, to realize the personal nature. This is the exact definition of the attainment of yoga. The third sutra of Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* is: *Tada drashtuh swaroope'vasthanam* – you become established in your own essential nature. *Swaroope* is the essential nature, *avasthanam* is to become established in, *drashtuh* is the person who is aware, the yogi, the practitioner of yoga who is a witness to everything that is taking place. This is the definition of health, *swasthya*. How does one attain it?

We become sick when we believe we are sick. It is our belief in sickness that makes us sick. If you do not believe in sickness, as many people don't, then you are healthy. Try to understand this point very clearly. It is the nature of the body to go through changes. Nothing is constant in the physical body. The changes that we perceive taking place in the physical systems and in our mental make-up create some kind of anxiety. When this fear and insecurity becomes an obsessive thought, it changes the quality and expression of the body. This change is disease, 'disturbed ease'. You are at ease with yourself when you are balanced. When that harmony is disturbed, it becomes 'dis-ease'.

We recognize that there are physical diseases and ailments. We recognize that there are psychological diseases and ailments. We also recognize that there are spiritual diseases and ailments. The body suffers many major and minor diseases, from the common cold to asthma, diabetes, hypertension and cancer. The mind suffers from lethargy, envy, greed, depression, frustration and neurotic behaviour. This indicates the dimension of mental illness. The complexes, inhibitions, the obsessive nature, the greed and anger are all mental diseases.

There are also spiritual diseases stemming from ego, *ahamkara*, from self-identity, when we begin to look down on others and believe we are the centre of all activity and life. When we begin to believe that we know more than other

people, when we identify with our prosperity and think that through our effort we have attained the highest status in life, it gives birth to inner arrogance. This inner arrogance gives birth to *tamas*, and *tamas* again binds one to the world of the senses. So we suffer from physical disease, mental disease and spiritual disease.

### **Broad spectrum on health**

Yogis have recognized this to be the cause of suffering, *dukha*. Parvati posed the question to Shiva, “How can a human being attain peace, happiness and health? How can a human being become free from suffering?” Shiva then expounded the science of yoga. Later, great masters of the yogic tradition codified the process of yoga. In the *Gherand Samhita*, Maharishi Gherand talks of the seven stages of yoga as *saptanga yoga*. Sage Patanjali codified the system of yoga in eight stages as *ashtanga yoga*. Dattatreya codified yoga according to his experience. In *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, Sage Swatmarama emphasized the component of hatha yoga. From time to time, different thinkers and saints came forward to propagate a system of techniques and teach practices which could raise the level of human consciousness, make people more aware of their lives and how to manage the environment, the body and mind.

Therefore, in yoga we find three different dimensions related to the harmonious development of the human personality: curative, preventive and promotive. The curative dimension comes first. It has been the experience of yoga practitioners in the modern age that when we become sick physically, we go to a doctor, take some medicine and try to feel well. Of course, there is no question that medical science has made great advances with the purpose of helping mankind, but still we find that medical science is in its infancy. It cannot cure a disease; it can only suppress the symptoms that manifest. Whether it is diabetes or hypertension, over time the effect of the medicine lessens as the body begins to adapt and become immune to the chemical changes. Then we realize that medical science is not really helping us.

## Yoga practices for good health

At this stage many people decide to try yoga. They practise some asanas and pranayamas. There has been ample scientific research in the world to satisfy the inquisitive mind that balanced asana practice can help manage the most basic to the most life-threatening illnesses. It has been our experience that in forty days, non-insulin dependent diabetes can be managed with yoga. It has also been our experience that respiratory disorders such as bronchitis, asthma, eosinophilia, etc. can be managed through continued yoga practice. Of course, do not expect miracles from yoga.

There is a statement in the *Yoga Sutras* (1:14) in relation to *abhyasa* or practice: *Sa tu dirghakala nairantaryasatkarasevito dridhabhoomih* – practice should be for an extended period of time, with continuity and the feeling of conviction and faith. These three conditions will ensure there is a solid foundation for growth and development. So when we start the yoga practices, the imbalances of the body are automatically observed and transformed by the practitioner. This leads to the experience of health.

Many people come to yoga for the purposes of therapy, as a last resort, after dissatisfaction with other therapies, by which time the roots of the illness have gone deep into the mind. A disease that was only ten percent intense ten years ago is now one hundred percent more powerful. Just as a seed grows into a small plant and then a big tree, the seeds of disease are planted in the human psyche. When the seed sprouts, we ignore it because we feel that our stamina and vitality will overcome the problem we see in the form of a tiny sprout. But as the sprout eventually becomes a tree and disease takes root in our personality and mind, we take up yoga and are benefited by it. Just imagine what the potential of yoga would be if we were to start practising it early.

Stress works at three levels: on the muscles, the nervous system and the mind. When you are tense, one part of your body will become very tight, usually either the abdomen, the neck or the muscles of the perineum. These are the main stress centres of the body. In times of tension or anxiety, when we



are unsure what the outcome of a particular situation will be, we notice a tightening in one of these three regions, which blocks the flow of prana shakti. It will create stress in the normal state of the nervous system. The nervous system will in turn affect the cerebral functions, and cerebral malfunction will then affect the mind.

Starting from the muscles and going to the nervous system, to the brain, to the mind, pawanmuktasana is the easiest, simplest and most effective yoga practice to release tension and stress. Nadi shodhana, alternate nostril breathing, deepens awareness of the breathing process and relaxes agitation in the brain, mind and nervous system by controlling the breath. Yoga nidra along with the practice of ajapa japa overcomes the psychological fear of disease. These four practices induce greater optimism of mind, a clearer sankalpa for wellbeing and overcome the fear of death. Once the body and mind are harmonized, physical disease is also reversed.

We all aspire for mental peace, physical health and longevity. By doing very simple and basic practices to create a change, we can achieve this goal. Asanas, pranayama and the hatha yoga shatkarmas play a vital role in the attainment of health, peace and longevity.

### **Unity in diversity**

We are all sick. Some are sick physically, some mentally, some emotionally, some spiritually. Due to sickness we cannot find the ultimate creative expression in our life, and without this contact there is confusion and suffering. But once we are in touch with the creative principle, there is satisfaction, contentment, happiness and joy. There is greater participation in society.

In India we have always believed in unity in diversity. People associate this with a social identity or concept in relation to a nation, where many different cultures live together, supporting each other and growing together. However, unity in diversity also represents the total development of the human personality. The expressions of the

individual personality at different times are very diverse. Finding balance in these expressions is the attainment of 'Shiva-hood'.

If you look at the yogic concept, as in the process of kundalini yoga and kriya yoga, our gross energies are sublimated and the energy is finally united with Shiva in sahasrara chakra. This is the theory of kundalini yoga, the theory of the chakras. To attain Shiva-hood means, therefore, that we begin to experience unity in diversity. We begin to experience *ekagrata*, focused, one-pointed awareness, in an environment where there are many distractions and diversions. This is the aim of yoga.

### **Three sadhanas to perfect**

You have to try and perfect three sadhanas in your life. The first sadhana is learning how to relax. Today people are not able to relax. Medicines to relax the body and mind outnumber all other medicines combined. We have lost our peace of mind. We have lost our ability to relax in what we call the rat race of society. So the first sadhana and first purpose of yoga in our lives today is knowing how to relax. The second sadhana you need to perfect is developing awareness. After relaxation become aware, expand your mind, expand the range of your perceptions and see how your interactions in society, in your profession, with your family affect your behaviour, attitudes, mentality, aspirations and efforts.

The third sadhana is *ekagrata*, learning to channel the energies and focus the mind. After *ekagrata* comes *sanyam*. After you have focused yourself, after you have observed the causes of your dissatisfaction, then you begin to restrain the negative expressions and transform them into positive qualities. After *sanyam* comes *shanti*, peace. When you have transformed the negative nature into a dynamic, vibrant, positive, creative nature, then peace is attained.

In the modern context we should not look at yoga from the perspective of *yama*, *niyama*, *asana*, *pranayama*, *pratyahara*, *dharana*, and *dhyana*, leading to *samadhi* and God-realization. Rather, we should look at yoga in a systematic

and practical way: firstly as a process to develop the ability to relax and secondly as a process to expand the horizons of perception. Thirdly, we should develop the ability to focus the mind at one point, experience the attentive mind, and learn how and when to hold ourselves back and how and when to go forward. This will become the cause of our development and growth, and so it is the foundation of yoga.

### **Spirituality is inner maturity**

If you look at yoga from this angle, you will observe that there is no religious or spiritual component involved. Spirituality is not any different to normal life. The so-called spiritual attitude is maturity of the human mind and emotions. This maturity is spirituality. The word 'spirituality' indicates that you are in tune with your inner nature. Being in tune with your inner nature means realizing the different dimensions of the body, mind and spirit, and creating balance and harmony in their expressions. That brings you closer to your inner self, the real self, not the external self that is subject to ambitions and desires.

A child has the same mind, senses, emotions and feelings as an adult, but the child's expressions and behaviour are different. The adult has more mental and emotional maturity. There is a difference in the lives of a householder and a sannyasin. The sannyasin has the ability to observe not only the result, but also the cause. It is this maturity that represents spiritual life.

Religious life is different to spiritual life. There are people who are religious, who believe in God, but they are not in contact with their inner nature, so they are not necessarily spiritual. This is the main difference between the religious mentality and the spiritual mentality. The religious mentality also aims to experience unity. In fact, the purpose of religion, which means to re-unite, is yoga.

### **Dharma**

There are two concepts of dharma: sanatan dharma and yuga dharma. When we think in terms of sanatan dharma, it is in

terms of the continuity and development of human qualities. But please remember that sanatan dharma is not Hindu dharma. Sanatan dharma is awareness of the relationship that exists between the individual and God. This relationship is unique to every individual, in every culture, tradition, caste, tribe and society. Whether Hindus, Christians or Muslims, people have their own feeling and experience of God. There is a desire to experience oneness with God and this leads to pious acts, thoughts and behaviour, which then become part of the *sanatan* or eternal culture, which aims to unite the individual with the cosmic self.

In yuga dharma, the practices leading to unity can differ from time to time. In our culture we have seen the emergence of Vaishnava thought, Shaiva thought, Shakta thought, Buddhist thought, Jain thought and many other beliefs, institutions and paths. These thoughts are relevant to a group of people at a particular period of time in history. After some time, when the need changes, the yuga dharma also changes or is modified to meet that need.

Yoga always refers to dharma as the sanatan or eternal principle. You have to remember this very clearly. For this reason we say that yoga is not part of any organized religious belief, but leads one to the experience of spirit, to the realization that spirit and cosmic energy are one and the same. So from this perspective, spirituality is maturity of action, thought, attitude and behaviour. In this context yoga can provide you with a greater understanding of or affinity with the human dharma.

Yoga is relevant to our life both in its abstract form and in its definite concrete form. It does not advocate escapism, but it advocates embracing life. This is what we see in the descriptions of yoga as taught by Sage Patanjali. Why is moral transformation required in the process of yoga? If yoga were purely spiritual, then the yamas and niyamas would not be necessary. We would just have to meditate and experience. Then even asana and pranayama and also pratyahara and dharana would not be necessary. Yoga could just be said to be a component of dhyana and identification with the higher

self, and that's it. However, it has always been believed that human expression leads one to suffering and also to freedom.

The *Bhagavad Gita* states that action leads to bondage and action leads to freedom. When action becomes selfish, when it is coloured by tamas and rajas, it leads one to bondage. When action is selfless and is guided by the principles of sattwa, it leads one to freedom. There is no denial of action, no denial of life's responsibilities, but the whole emphasis is on changing one's attitudes and perceptions.

To change your perceptions, you have to start from the very basic stages of yoga: relaxing, being aware, realizing where the tension, confusion, conflict or disease lie, and making an effort to alter these states of body and mind. The yamas and niyamas represent qualitative transformations of the human mind. Asana and pranayama represent harmony of the physical body, brain and energy. Pratyahara and dharana represent the systems of mind management and emotional management that develop ekagrata through the concentration techniques of yoga, the meditative and introspective techniques of yoga. Dhyana gives birth to human wisdom, leading to maturity of mind and emotion.

### **The yogic journey**

We have adopted asanas because our journey begins with the physical body, something gross, something concrete, something definite. We have started our journey with increasing our prana shakti through pranayama. So asana and pranayama are the beginning of our yogic journey. It is the body and mind that suffer in times of crisis, so we are learning how to manage physical and mental crisis in the form of ill-health or disease through asana, pranayama, pratyahara and dharana. The next stage is understanding the psychology of meditation. This is our next point in the journey of yoga.

# The Psychology of Meditation

Fine Arts Cultural Centre, Chembur, February 10, 2001

Yoga is a subject full of wisdom, with physical, mental, spiritual, emotional and psychic components. In our society not all the components are known, and most people believe yoga to be either hatha yoga, physically orientated practices, or raja yoga, mentally orientated practices.

However, some traditions see the human personality as an integrated unit of head, heart and hands. To integrate these qualities has been the attempt of the tradition that began with Swami Sivananda, and which has continued down the line and been developed further by his many disciples. One of the masters of the modern renaissance of yoga is our guru, Swami Satyananda. He developed a style of yoga that aims at stimulating and awakening the shakti, the prana of the body and mind, according to the yogic concept of *koshas* or sheaths.

Yoga says that hidden within the physical body there are other more subtle bodies, just as butter and yoghurt are hidden inside milk and can only be extracted through a process of churning. The physical body is known as *annamaya kosha*, or the body of matter. Hidden inside the physical body are *pranamaya kosha*, the body of pranic energy, *manomaya kosha*, the body of the mind, *vijnanamaya kosha*, the body of consciousness, and *anandamaya kosha*, the dimension of spirit.

## **Systematizing and classifying yoga**

Yoga practices have to be combined in the correct way, because each form of yoga is actually a separate ingredient. To prepare a meal you do not simply buy vegetables and boil them in hot water; you need to add other ingredients to create the right taste. Similarly, in yoga you need to combine the different practices in order to create the right effect. Swami Satyananda devised a system in which different components of the yoga practices are combined to create a homogenous experience.

Take the pawanmuktasana series, for example. Other yoga teachers and traditions speak of pawanmuktasana as a single yoga posture or asana. But in the Bihar Yoga system, which is continuously evolving, the tantric yoga traditions have been researched and from them extracted certain asanas pranayama, pratyahara and dharana practices previously unknown to the public. People used to teach meditation and say they were teaching pratyahara, but nobody had identified which practices belonged to pratyahara, which to dharana, which to dhyana, and which practices were mentioned in the ancient tantric literature and not only in the yoga shastras, hatha yoga or raja yoga texts.

Swami Satyananda developed a series of very simple practices that many people also call warming-up exercises. He named these techniques the pawanmuktasana series and classified the practices into two groups of about thirty-six movements. The first is the anti-rheumatic series and the second is the anti-gastric series. Rheumatism and arthritis are caused by an excess of *vata* or wind and *pitta* or bile. The pawanmuktasana series provides relief from such impurities inherent in the body. Research is continually going on to develop yoga practices, to rediscover them from the shastras, and to present them with a modern scientific understanding and background.

## **Psychological problems and meditation therapy**

The mind is continuously being influenced by inputs which become impressions. One example is of a six-year-old boy whose parents had gone out and left him at home with a

baby-sitter. She had prepared a meal for him with pumpkin as the main vegetable. Children have very strong likes and dislikes, and the boy did not want to eat the pumpkin, but the baby-sitter threatened to punish him and made him eat the pumpkin. Later, he developed asthma.

Another example is a lady who had been suffering from chronic headaches for as long as she could remember. She had seen many doctors and specialists around the world who had given her various medications, but nothing had worked and she continued to have severe headaches. She appeared at the ashram and lived there for some time.

The third example is of a young boy who went fishing with his father one day. He had a small tin in which he kept worms for bait. However, when he went to the river bank and opened the tin, there were no worms inside, only blow flies that swarmed out of the tin into his face.

The fourth example is of an eight-year-old boy who appeared to be have epileptic fits and become unconscious. His family tried every kind of treatment, but nothing helped.

The boy in the first example developed asthma. He eventually studied medicine and became a doctor, but found no cure for his asthma. He came to the ashram and practised asanas and pranayamas, but still nothing helped. However, one day when he was practising meditation, he had a vision of himself as a small boy and remembered the incident of the pumpkin. After remembering that, his asthma disappeared, without any medication, or asana or pranayama, just through meditation. Since that day he has not had a single attack of asthma.

In this example, suppression became the cause of the asthma. When suppression becomes the cause of a physical illness, medication cannot help the condition, because it is not physical, not due to a chemical imbalance in the body, but due to psychological suppression. Even scientists today say that many people who suffer from respiratory disorders have either had some kind of emotional suppression in the past or have suppressed some desire. Their need to release manifests in the form of a respiratory problem, and they cannot breathe in and out freely.



In the second example, the lady with the headaches tried everything, but nothing worked, not asana, not pranayama, not relaxation. Our guru said to her, “If you have faith in me, then leave your medication and experience the pain. When you feel pain, meditate and go deep into the pain.” The lady trusted him. She gave up her medication. The pain was so intense that she would cry out. Sometimes we had to physically restrain her from banging her head against the wall. One day, while she was meditating on the pain, she became unconscious. After a few minutes, the headache went and never came back. She recalled that she had a vision of a previous life, in which she saw herself as a miner working in a coal mine. There was a big rumbling sound and the miner looked up and saw the roof of the tunnel cave in. She had been that miner in a previous life.

In the third example, the small boy had no idea that a worm could transform itself into an insect with wings, and he went into a state of momentary shock. Later in life, when he started to meditate and was able to witness this event from his early childhood, he was able to release the fear that had been created by the experience, and live a normal life. There was no longer any fear of the dark, no claustrophobia. He overcame his depression and became open and receptive.

The fourth example concerned the small boy who used to go into an unconscious state. His parents thought he was having epileptic fits, but a sadhu told them that the boy was experiencing the state of samadhi. The child had been a yogi in his past life, and in this life, because of his karmas, he was reborn. But even in early childhood, when his rationality was not fully functional and he was unable to verbalize what he was experiencing, he was experiencing the state of samadhi. However, his parents, due to insecurity and fear, thought that he was having epileptic fits.

### **Cleansing the mind of archetypes**

These impressions in the mind make up the psychological structure that remains with the child for the rest of his life. The input is social and cultural, and comes from the family,

friends and environment. These impressions become the building blocks of the human mentality and character. As our intellect evolves, as we become rational and mature, we tend to ignore many of these impressions, which then go into our unconscious mind and remain there in the form of a seed. When the time is appropriate, they manifest in the form of attitudinal behaviour, which makes one happy or sad, joyful in life or struggling. This is human psychology.

The human mind is like a sponge. A sponge initially holds only air, but when it comes in contact with water it soaks it up. It holds the water until you squeeze it out. The human mind is pure by nature. It is not tainted by the influences of the moral character prevalent in society, or by the religious nature prevalent in the family. In the process of growing up, in the process of physical and psychological development, these impressions create the personality. We call these impressions *samskaras*, and psychologists call them archetypes.

The body consumes food, absorbs the nutrients and eliminates the waste products, but the mind does not do so. The mind craves fulfilment, seeks enjoyment and pleasure, and makes every effort to satisfy itself, but there is no elimination. If we feed our body without eliminating the waste, the body will become sick. We recognize that for good health it is important to remove the waste matter from the body. We should also recognize that in order to have a healthy mind, we should remove the waste and the toxins that accumulate in the mind in our search for pleasure, prosperity and fulfilment.

This is where meditation comes in. According to the yogic tradition, meditation is divided into three groups: *pratyahara*, *dharana* and *dhyana*. However, in our approach to meditation we always want to experience something we have never experienced in life – *shanti*, peace. We desire peace, but have never experienced it. We desire realization, but our own beliefs about God, nature and human qualities are very limited. Therefore, we cannot experience God even after a lifetime of meditation practice. We can have glimpses, but they are fleeting and momentary, not permanent.

The word 'meditation' in English means mental attention. In Sanskrit the word is *dhyana*, which means intellect, wisdom, knowledge that becomes the vehicle for personal transformation. The word *dhyana* is composed of the words *dhi*, meaning buddhi, rationality, knowledge, the creative expression of intellect, and *yan*, meaning vehicle, where the mind itself becomes the vehicle to experience the deeper content of consciousness. That is the concept and definition of the word *dhyana*.

### **Discovering the mind through meditation**

So what is the first experience of meditation? The first attempt is discovery of the mind. Mind is *chetana*, conscious, *avachetana*, subconscious, and *achetana*, unconscious. According to yoga psychology and also modern psychology, we function in the realm of the conscious mind, in the realm of buddhi. But even manifestation of buddhi at the conscious level is impeded. There is no viveka, or discrimination, there is only jnana, 'I know'.

The subconscious is the seed of memory. Yoga speaks of five vrittis: pramana, viparyaya, vikalpa, nidra and smriti. *Smriti* or memory is the fifth vritti, representing the subconscious. The subconscious is where the archetypes and impressions are stored. They are not on the conscious level. If all the memories accumulated in our life became conscious, a human being would go crazy, because the capacity of our brain, mind and senses is not big enough to hold the entire memory of lifetimes at the conscious level. So they become samskaras. Suppression becomes a samskara. Fear becomes a samskara.

In the example of the lady suffering from headaches, the last impression she had before dying was of pain, of the roof of the tunnel falling on her head. So in this birth, the pain manifested in the form of a headache which medication could not help, but which meditation eventually helped by recognizing the role that memory had played in her life. Once the memory was identified, there was no reason to suffer any more. So *dhyana* or meditation is a technique of purifying

and balancing oneself psychologically, by first recognizing the impressions which are inherent in the mind, then releasing the impressions which restrict the expression and the normal behaviour of the mind, and finally focusing the mind and overcoming the distractions.

### **The vrittis**

Just as we recognize the conscious, subconscious and unconscious states, yoga also recognizes four different conditions of mind: *moodha*, dull, *kshipta*, dissipated, *vikshipta*, oscillating, and *ekagrata*, one-pointedness. In meditation we attempt to achieve *ekagrata*, but we have not understood that *moodha* or ignorance is the dormant state of our mind. It is this state that is creating havoc in our life. Our senses associate with the sense objects, but there is no knowledge or understanding of this association. When there is no understanding, then the association combines with ignorance. This *samkirna vritti*, the confined vritti, the restricted expression of mind, becomes the cause of suffering and unfulfilled desire and ambition. This unfulfilled desire and ambition completely destroys our peace of mind. It makes us extrovert by nature, and the more extroverted we become, the more identification there is with outside objects of pleasure. The source of happiness is outside, the drive to attain fulfilment is outside. This is the effect of *moodha vritti*.

The second stage is *kshipta*, the confused state of mind, not knowing how to act, how to behave, how to express oneself, what to do and when and how to do it. There is absolute confusion.

The third stage is *vikshipta*, the disturbed, dissipated state of mind, which lacks willpower, clarity and conviction. This state of mind has to be transformed into the *ekagra* or one-pointed mind. This is the aim of meditation. In our own practice, what we are trying to do is to focus our mind on one object, the object of contemplation. But we have not discovered the *moodha vritti*. We have not managed our *chitta vrittis*, the confusions of the *kshipta* state. We have not managed the *vikshipta*, dissipated state of mind. So when

we try to follow a process of ekagrata, one-pointedness, we struggle with ourselves. This has been the experience of practically everybody.

Swami Sivananda used to say that the dominant nature of the mind is *vyavrichari vritti*, flitting from one object to another and on to another, without really knowing what one is looking for. It is a confused source. Just like a bee moves from one flower to the next in order to accumulate honey, our mind in its search for happiness seeks enjoyment in one form of association, then another form, and the search goes on. So if we have to concentrate or focus ourselves, we find it is a very difficult process. The mind cannot be stilled.

### **Pratyahara**

In an attempt to still the mind, yoga came up with the system of pratyahara. Pratyahara is withdrawing the attention from the outside sensory associations and focusing internally, balancing oneself. When you try to observe the inner reactions, in the form of moods, thoughts and desires, this becomes the practice of observation. The aim of pratyahara is to overcome the moodha, kshipta and vikshipta states of mind, the dull, confused and dissipated states of mind. You will be able to discover the causes of imbalance in your life through the process of pratyahara.

What are the practices of pratyahara? One sutra of yoga states, “Always start the practice with relaxation.” The practice of yoga nidra is the first technique of pratyahara – learning how to let go of the voluntary control and movement of body and mind, learning how to observe the stages of tension and relaxation as we create them in our physical body and in the mind, learning how to release the psychological subconscious tensions as they manifest in our body. Relaxation is the first step.

We associate relaxation with sleep, but sleep is not relaxation. You have had the experience many times that when you wake up in the morning, your body and mind are still tired, and if you try to sleep more, the body and mind become more lethargic. So sleep does not represent relaxation

of body and mind. Sleep is an in-built mechanism of prakriti to stop the overload of the brain and mind. It is just like the overflow facility on a water tank. When the tank is filled with water, the excess water comes out through the overflow pipe. Similarly, when the sensory inputs continue to hammer the brain and senses, sleep is a natural mechanism to stop the overloading. The mind is then able to release the excess accumulated information in the form of dreams, in the form of memories.

The concept of relaxation in yoga is sleepless sleep, which has been called yoga nidra, because yoga nidra is a practice of dynamic mind movement. The mind is made to move dynamically from one experience to another – right hand thumb, first finger, second finger, etc. The mind jumps from one part of the body to the other and is constantly active. Nowhere in yoga nidra is it said, ‘don’t move your attention.’ Continuous instructions are given to move the attention, to keep on moving and not become fixed at any point. So it is a dynamic process of mind that we experience in yoga nidra, and yet in this dynamic activity there is recognition of the state of relaxation.

The second aspect of pratyahara is antar mouna, observing those activities of mind that become conscious. Thinking is a conscious activity. Thoughts can be identified consciously. Antar mouna is observation of the thoughts which represent your desires, samskaras, aspirations and expectations, which represent your selfish and selfless nature, *sakama* and *nishkama*, thoughts which are desirable and undesirable, positive and negative. Because, after all, in our life it is not only the good that exists, but also the bad. In *prakriti*, nature, day exists side by side with night. Virtue exists side by side with sin, and the same thing that we experience outside is experienced inside.

Antar mouna is the recognition of these activities becoming conscious. Antar mouna is acceptance of both sides of the nature of the human personality – the good and the bad. The conflict happens when we try to ignore, suppress or disregard the negative and accept only the

positive and good. We all know that the negative force is very powerful, more so than the positive. But, of course, when the positive forces come alive, then that is the ultimate experience of sublimation. When the negative forces become predominant, it is the experience of bondage. We want to release ourselves from our bondage, but we do not know what is binding us.

### **Imaginary bondage**

We are all subject to habit. You know the story of the camel caravan travelling through the desert. Night came and the camels were tied up to stakes in the ground. One stake was missing, which meant that one camel could not be tied up. People thought that the camel would run off at night and they would be one camel short. But an elderly man, who had had some experience of life, gave a good suggestion. He said, “The camel is an animal of habit. It knows that when night comes, it will be tied up. So just go through the motions of tying the camel up with an imaginary rope, and it will not run away.” They did so and the camel lay down. Everyone went to sleep and forgot about what had transpired.

Next morning the caravan prepared to move. The camels were untied and all stood up, except one. They tried goading the camel, pushing and pulling it, but the camel would not move. Again the elderly man came to the rescue, asking, “Did you unhitch the camel?” And as soon as they went through the motions of untying the camel, it got up ready to move.

Our life is also like that. We are slaves of our habits. We tie ourselves down with imaginary ropes that we consider as binding. These imaginary ropes are known as *asakti*, attachments. Adi Guru Shankaracharya used to say, “Who is my father? I do not know. Who is my mother? I do not know. Who is my brother or sister? I do not know. Whose son am I? I do not know. Whose father am I? I do not know.” We are all playing a role in life. Just like on the silver screen, we are all actors. We associate with different people and this association creates a *sambandh*, a relationship which is recognized as son,

daughter, brother, sister, mother, father, relation or friend. But is that sambandh the actual relationship, the inner relationship, or is it only sensorial and sensual? Adi Guru Shankaracharya used to pose such questions, which have become the foundation stones of Advaita Vedanta.

In the context of our lives, this sambandh becomes our *swabhava* or nature and it begins to affect our behaviour. Asakti, attachment, is the bondage with which we have tied ourselves, and we believe we are bound. But in reality nothing is binding us. We are like the camel. The moment we overcome asakti, we realize we were never bound, we were always free. That is known as *mukti*. Asakti and mukti are like two sides of a coin – head and tails, day and night, good and bad, plus and minus. It is the asakti that we recognize by observing the thoughts.

### **Steps to freedom**

Later, in order to go deeper into the subconscious and the unconscious, we use mantra. Mantras are sound vibrations that sensitize the mind and direct it inwards to inner experiences and understanding. Sound existed before the concept of God came into the picture. It was only intellectual man who associated mantra with God, many thousands of years after mantra was conceived. Before the idea of God was created in people's minds, mantra in the form of sound vibrations continued to alter the vibrational, pranic, mental personality.

Around the world, outside India, we initiate people of different beliefs, cultures and traditions, Christians and Muslims, into mantra. They have no idea of the meaning of the mantra 'Om Namah Shivaya', for example, but in India people believe, due to their associations, that it is a Shiva mantra. They have the image of Shiva and an understanding of the word 'namah', an understanding of the word 'Om'. So, when they say, 'Om Namah Shivaya', the spontaneous idea which comes to mind is, "I am bowing down to Shiva", and Shiva represents an image, a form of Godhead. But outside India, when people who are not aware of this association



practise the mantra ‘Om Namah Shivaya’, they concentrate on the sound vibration only, not on the image of Shiva.

Each consonant and each vowel form a vibration, a *spandan*, and vibrate a particular psychic centre of the body. That psychic centre stimulates a part of the dormant brain, stimulates a part of the subtle mind, and it sensitizes the mind to go deeper into the experience of purity and harmony. Mantras are also adopted in pratyahara, the techniques that allow the mind to become introverted. The techniques that allow the mind to recognize its own creations and reactions are pratyahara. When this filtering of the impressions, inputs and expressions of the inner mind in the outer world has taken place, then dharana, one-pointed awareness, begins. We have moved up from moodha, kshipta and vikshipta to ekagrata, on the completion of pratyahara, and that is dharana.

### **Dharana**

‘To hold the attention focused’ is the meaning of *dharana*. There are different kinds of dharana, but three are important: the dharana of intellect, the dharana of emotion and the dharana of instinct. Intellectual dharana is known as chidakasha. Emotional dharana is known as hridayakasha. Instinctual dharana is known as daharakasha. Fixing the mind, not allowing it to fluctuate, and maintaining that one-pointed state, eliminates impurities from the subtle instinctive level, the emotional level and the intellectual level. The faculties of intellect, emotion and instinct become one. When they become one, it is known as prajna. *Tasya prajna pratishthita* – ‘There wisdom dawns,’ or ‘There wisdom becomes established’ (*Bhagavad Gita*, 2:57). When wisdom becomes established, it is known as dhyana. And we come back to our first definition of dhyana: Wisdom becomes the vehicle for the development, growth, evolution, transformation and transmutation of human consciousness.

So, when we think of yoga psychology, when we think of the psychology of meditation, we have to understand that it is a gradual process of realizing the vrittis, overcoming them and becoming established in our real nature – *Tada drashtuh*

*swaroope avasthanam* (Patanjali, 1:3). Therefore, do not try to aspire for God-realization until you have purified yourself. Thinking about God is definitely not a bad idea, but aspiring for God-realization is not appropriate at this stage of our life. In our present condition we need to attain inner purity, purification of the mental state, eradication of the negative vrittis and samskaras, and cultivation of the positive vrittis and samskaras. Yoga speaks of cultivating the positive vrittis. It does not only speak of 'vritti nirodha', but also of attainment of a particular kind of vritti which becomes the launching pad for spiritual evolution. This vritti, which has to be developed, is *brahmi vritti*, the transcendental vritti.

This is the process of meditation. The theory is complex, but the beginning is very simple. So start with that which is simple and can lead you to fulfilment. The next stage in the journey of yoga will lead to kundalini yoga.

# Kundalini Yoga

Arya Samaj Mandir Hall, Santa Cruz, February 10, 2001

Once a tiny ant came across a computer printout of a map of the world. It was very surprised to suddenly find a white field, which we know to be paper. Put yourself in the ant's position. You do not know what paper is. All you can see is a white field stretching into the horizon. As you continue walking, you come across some black spots and start to think, "What is this white field with black areas?" You begin to wonder what this whole experience is all about. But if somebody were to lift the ant up, when it looked down, it could recognize the white field as being a piece of paper and the black dots as images on that paper, and be able to see the whole picture. This is an example of the expansion of perception, or raising of consciousness in an ant. You have to lift the ant up from the piece of paper in order for it to see the bigger image.

Once, in the early days, when our guru, Swami Satyananda, had joined the ashram of our paramguru Swami Sivananda in Rishikesh, he had a dream in which he saw a huge sprawling city. What caught his attention was the absence of light in the city. So the next morning he asked his guru the meaning. Swami Sivananda explained that what he had seen in the dream was a symbolic representation of the human brain and consciousness. The absence of light in the city meant there was no energy, because the current was not flowing. This explanation of the brain inspired Paramahamsaji to discover how the current, the energy,

the shakti, can flow in a readymade city, how to make that connection.

Paramahamsaji realized that in order to illumine the city, the power has to flow through the channels. The city is the brain, the mind, the consciousness, and the power is the kundalini. When kundalini energy, the primal force, ascends through the various layers and states of consciousness, through the various chakras, and reaches sahasrara, illumination takes place. At that time you are able to see the bigger picture after having raised yourself from ground level.

When you are functioning at ground level, you are not able to see the complete picture. You only walk around the surface of the planet and you can only see for a certain distance. But if you go up in a helicopter, your perception changes and you are able to see a greater area. When you go up in a rocket, you are able to see an even greater area of the planet. Eventually, what you perceived as huge will look the size of a golf ball when viewed from outer space – not big at all. This has been the theory and practice of kundalini yoga – raising the consciousness from the gross level, raising and altering human perception to experience the transcendental nature of life. This is the subject of kundalini yoga.

### **Theory of kundalini**

The theory of kundalini yoga is relevant to us in our life. It begins with the realization that *chakras* or psychic centres exist in the human personality and body. The human body is a miraculous machine. The functioning of all the organs in harmony is something that cannot be replicated. What is the connection between the body and mind? What is the connection between consciousness and mind? What is the connection and relationship between the cosmic nature and the individual nature? The entire universe, the entire macrocosmos, is contained in the microcosmic body and mind. Our body and mind is a reflection of the macrocosmos.

When we think of purification, transcendence and realization of the self, what are we attempting to understand

and experience? Kundalini yoga represents the ultimate aim of yoga, transformation of the gross nature of mind and realization of the transcendental qualities of the self. The representation of the evolving consciousness is indicated in the form of chakras. Chakras are recognized as centres of energy, but they are also centres of an altered state of consciousness.

Consciousness is not a constant reality. There is fluctuation in the field of consciousness. Each peak and low in the fluctuation of consciousness represents an altered state of human perception. During the day we experience different altered states of mind: the peaceful mind, the anxious mind, the relaxed mind, the aggressive mind, the awakened mind, the dormant mind. This is what is manifesting on the outside, but there are undercurrents as well, just like in the ocean. On the surface of the ocean we see the generation and movement of waves, but the waves do not represent the totality of the movement in the ocean. There are undercurrents as well, which are invisible. Similarly, what we experience as our mind is actually the surface, but the deeper mind, the inner mind, has been identified as consciousness, *chetana*.

There is a difference between mind and consciousness. Our concept of mind is that attribute of human awareness or consciousness which is interacting in the world of name, form and idea, which is associating with the experiences of the external sensorial world, and which makes us aware of our life in society and our aspirations to progress on the social ladder. This manifest consciousness is known as the mind. The unmanifest consciousness is known as *chetana* or *chitta*. *Chitta* is the mind where the subtle movements and undercurrents within the ocean exist. The ocean is not only the waves on the surface or the invisible undercurrents; it is the totality of water. The consciousness is the totality, the total experience of movements of mind in the realm of *manas*, the rational mind, and in the realm of *chitta*. This consciousness also undergoes changes and transformations, and these are identified in the chakras.

## The chakras

Before we discuss the chakras and their relationship with consciousness, and how consciousness can be awakened, let us look at the basic yogic concept of where the chakras are situated in the body, what kind of energy they hold, and what kind of consciousness they express. There are seven chakras, but the last one, the seventh, is not counted because it is the ultimate attainment of human life. Therefore, the tradition speaks of six chakras. These six chakras are associated with the realm of prakriti while the seventh chakra is associated with transcendental consciousness. The six chakras associated with the realm of prakriti are mooladhara, swadhisthana, manipura, anahata, vishuddhi and ajna.

According to yoga philosophy, human consciousness has become static and stagnant in the lowest of the chakras, mooladhara, located at the base of the spine. Mooladhara is the gross mind, the insecure mind, the desiring mind. Unfulfilled aspirations and desires create an insecure mind. Fulfilled desires give birth to more desires, and this is the activity of mooladhara chakra. The positive dimension of mooladhara is stability and the negative dimension is instability, insecurity and the desire to become secure. The form of energy in mooladhara chakra is apana shakti. The form of consciousness is the *moodha vritti* or *moodha chetana*, gross consciousness.

Swadhisthana chakra is the second psychic centre, located in the sacral region of the spinal column. If you look at your spine you will not find these chakras, but if you analyze scientifically, you will observe that all the major nerves of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems form a bunch in the spinal cord. As a group, they go up to the head. Swadhisthana chakra is a centre where different nerves converge: the sympathetic nervous system, the motor nervous system, the sensory nervous system, the parasympathetic nervous system merge there.

Swadhisthana chakra is responsible for fear, *bhaya*. In its positive dimension this chakra provides the experience of peace, *shanti*. When people say, “I want to be peaceful,” from

the yogic perspective they are saying, “I want to be in tune with my swadhisthana chakra.” The moment you are able to eradicate fear from your life, you experience peace. Fear is the absence of peace and peace is the absence of fear. This chakra is also ruled by apana vayu.

Manipura is the third chakra, situated behind the navel in the spine. It is the centre where prana shakti is experienced. An embryo in the mother’s womb sustains itself through the umbilical cord, through which it receives vitality, nourishment and energy from the mother. Manipura chakra has been conceived of as the centre of energy, of vitality, of fire. The negative aspect of manipura chakra is aggression and the positive aspect is vitality and dynamism. This centre is governed by prana vayu.

Anahata is the fourth chakra, situated behind the depression in the centre of the chest, in the spinal cord. The positive quality of anahata is selflessness and the negative quality of is selfishness. It is also the centre of human emotion, which connects you with desire, with the object of contemplation. This chakra is also governed by prana vayu.

The fifth chakra is vishuddhi, which is located behind the throat, in the spine. Vishuddhi represents the element of space, and is the centre for all transformation. As the name implies, the four lower chakras: mooladhara, swadhisthana, manipura and anahata, are *ashuddha*, impure. The fifth centre is *vishuddhi*, pure. It represents purity as it manifests in our life. Vishuddhi is the centre of transformation of human character, of human qualities, transformation of the gross mind, and sensitizing the gross mind to experience the intuitive mind, the inner mind.

The positive dimension of vishuddhi is creative expression of the human intellect, whether in the form of culture, art or science. The negative dimension is fixation on ideas which do not change at all. The stunted personality is the negative dimension and the maturing, growing personality is the positive dimension. It is the chakra where, when our growth is stunted, *tamas* is experienced in its full glory, but during the process of transformation *sattwa* is experienced in its full glory.

Ajna chakra is the sixth centre, situated in the centre of the head, the command centre. Ajna chakra is the doorway between the gross and the transcendental, the material and the spiritual. It is the seat of the guru. The guru chakra is also conceived of as being both positive and negative. The positive dimension is effulgence, knowledge and realization. The negative dimension is *avidya*, ignorance, not knowing.

These are the six centres representing altered states of consciousness, and energy. Once you go beyond ajna chakra there is the experience of sahasrara, the crown chakra. *Sahasrara* means a 'thousand spokes'. A thousand rays of light form the symbol of sahasrara chakra, which represents the ultimate realization of the cosmic principle, known as Shiva.

### **Meaning of kundalini**

When we talk of kundalini yoga, the yogis say that the inherent force of the chakras, like the inherent force in our life, is the mind. It is the mind that propels the activity of the senses. It is the mind that motivates one to act. It is the mind that desires inaction and experiences lethargy and sloth. It is the mind that is capable of experiencing enlightenment, and it is the mind that continuously experiences deluded states, *moha*. So the mind is the impelling power in life.

Similarly, the impelling force within the chakras is known as kundalini. The word 'kundalini' comes from the word *kunda*, meaning a deep pit, and also from *kundali* or coil. The entire concept of kundalini yoga is very deep. The depth of the realm encompasses seven layers of consciousness from transcendental to gross. Kundalini represents the dormant power, and is depicted in the form of a snake coiled three and a half times. This snake, which represents the state of our consciousness, has to be awakened.

The three coils of the snake represent the three *gunas* or qualities: sattwa, rajas and tamas. We become subject to the gunas and come under their influence when we are of a gross mentality. What we express in our life is the conditioning of the gunas. Our thoughts are conditioned by the gunas. The conditioning brought about by the gunas is



the *swabhava*, one's own nature. The intensity of the gunas is of equal potency in mooladhara chakra. As the kundalini is awakened, as the chakras begin to awaken, to vibrate and pulsate with life, the first transformation of kundalini is experienced in the form of a transformative quality, which represents kundalini shakti.

Yoga believes that kundalini is the representation of the primal force. It is this primal force which has to unite with primal consciousness, fusion and union of the transcendental energy, which is manifesting now as gross energy, and the transcendental mind, which is manifesting now as the gross mind. This is the union of Shiva and Shakti as conceived by the tantras. This is the union of Purusha and Prakriti as conceived by Samkhya. This is the experience of Brahma and Maya as conceived by Vedanta. This is the process of kundalini yoga: raising, transforming or altering the gunas. Then, as the gunas alter, the quality of consciousness changes.

You will have experienced that there are times when you are arrogant and times when you are compassionate. When you are expressing arrogance, tamas is predominant and when you are expressing compassion, sattwa is predominant. How can these two expressions co-exist? They co-exist because we are conditioned by the gunas. When this transformation happens internally, it alters the perceptions of consciousness. Connection takes place, and illumination is the result. The city without lights in Paramahamsaji's dream is suddenly illuminated in its full glory.

### **Who can awaken kundalini?**

How do we awaken the kundalini, and what is the process of awakening? There is some confusion about the process. People believe that awakening kundalini is the aim of yoga. It is the aim, just as the aim of education is to finally get a doctorate. But before you get the doctorate, it is necessary to pass through all the different classes that precede your PhD studies. You cannot simply jump into your PhD research without passing the previous stages. Therefore, kundalini yoga

is not for householders who are still engrossed and involved in the world.

Kundalini yoga is for those who have perfected hatha yoga and raja yoga. It is for those who have attuned their mind with their heart. Only then can kundalini yoga be practised. For this reason the teachings of kundalini yoga remained secret for many, many generations, and even today they are kept secret. There are people who claim to teach the principles and practices of kundalini, who claim to give the experience of pranic awakening, of energy awakening, but it is only a glimpse. There is no mastery of the process.

All the yogas lead to purification, harmony and balance. It is only kundalini yoga that leads to emancipation, *moksha*. Kundalini yoga has therefore been maintained as the final practice in yoga, and is transmitted from guru to disciple. It is very clearly stated in the yogic tradition that until you are ready to leave the attractions of external life, you should not even think about kundalini yoga. So we are not going to think about awakening the kundalini; we are going to think about awakening the chakras, because then we are able to overcome the basic instincts and establish ourselves in *prajna*, wisdom.

### **The four basic instincts**

The four basic instincts are *maithuna*, sexuality, *bhaya*, fear, *ahara*, desire, and *nidra*, sleep. They are expressions of the chakras. Sexuality manifests through mooladhara chakra. Fear manifests through swadhisthana chakra. Craving is the instinct of manipura chakra. Passivity and tranquillity are manifestations of anahata chakra. No matter what kind of spiritual sadhana we may do, the instincts play havoc in our life, even in the life of yogis.

The process of yoga is one of understanding and realizing. But this understanding and realizing is of the head, not of the instincts. The process of bhakti yoga is understanding and realizing the nature and quality of emotion. It is an experience of the heart, not of the instincts. You confront your instincts when you practise kundalini yoga. Instincts are the weights

that hold you down to this gross dimension. Sexuality grasps the attention, and that attention becomes the search for satisfaction and pleasure. But if you are able to sublimate the instinct of sexuality, it leads to samadhi. Progeny and pleasure are the main aims of sexuality in our life, but sublimation of the sex drive leads to moksha.

The second instinct is fear, which is the negative experience of swadhisthana chakra. The third instinct is *vasana*, meaning the desire rooted in your consciousness. *Ichha* is an implanted desire, *vasana* is an inherent desire. The third instinct is this inherent desire.

The fourth instinct is sleep. Sleep represents the storing of all the activity of mind and energy, the storing of interaction between the mind and senses, energy and the world. When you sleep, there is no concept of time, no concept of place, no concept of your posture. It is an absolute and totally unconscious state where buddhi is bypassed completely, and it is also an instinct. When there is no connection of the mind and energy with the senses and the world, we experience the energy in the form of an emotion at peace with itself.

### **Visualization and meditation**

To be able to recreate the image of an experience is a very important technique of kundalini yoga. This leads us first to identification of the form, then separation of the name and quality from the form. This is the purpose of visualization. In yogic meditative practices we use many different kinds of visualization. Sometimes the visualization is of an abstract event or object. Sometimes it is in the form of a story, a sequential observation. Sometimes it is subtle and internal, sometimes external and visual. Whatever form it may take, the purpose is that you begin to identify with what you are experiencing, with what you perceive, and become aware of it as an image, as a symbol.

Action does not lead to fulfilment. If we believe action leads to fulfilment, it is our concept only. Action leads to transformation. This is the awareness of action, *kriya shakti*, which comes into play in kundalini yoga. Similarly, *iccha*

*shakti*, awareness of desire, frees one from the bondage of that desire. *Sankalpa shakti*, awareness of will, the motivating force, propels one to experience the beauty and not the pain in life.

The awareness we speak of in yoga represents a realization of *iccha shakti*, *sankalpa shakti* and *kriya shakti* manifesting in human behaviour. Then *tanmayata*, meditation, leads to the deepening of awareness. *Tanmayata* is one of the best definitions of meditation. Meditation is not a process of closing the eyes and looking within, but of merging the mind with the experience. The experience and the experiencer become one; that is *tanmayata*, meditation.

These are the necessary components of kundalini yoga. Other components are added to this system according to the need of the *sadhaka*. The purpose of kundalini yoga is to attain sublimation in life, *moksha*, freedom from the cycle of birth and death, and the final experience of the integrated human self.

### **Purpose of kundalini yoga**

We have to know the real purpose of kundalini yoga. We have to change our ideas about yoga leading to attainment in terms of *siddhis*. Once somebody asked Paramahamsaji what his *siddhis* were. Paramahamsaji said, “I don’t have any *siddhis*, I’m just a normal human being like all of you.” The person persisted with many questions such as “Are you telepathic? Can you fly? Can you walk on water? Can you foresee events that are going to happen?” and Paramahamsaji said no to all the queries. Eventually the person gave up and said, “Then tell me what you are able to do in life.” Paramahamsaji replied, “All I can do is stand on my own two feet.” This simple statement indicates the greatest achievement, the greatest *siddhi* of life. To be able to stand on one’s own two feet without any props or support is the aim of kundalini yoga. Once the connection is made, the citadel is illumined, and you become a person with the ability to stand on your own two feet. That is known as *poornata*, completeness or fullness.

# Interviews

## MEDIA INTERVIEW, MUMBAI

**It seems that as India is becoming more and more geared towards consumerism and material things, young people are also simultaneously being driven towards spirituality and yoga. There seems to be two strands conflicting and yet happening at the same time.**

In rural India and in metropolitan areas too, young people are attracted to yoga because it provides them with better physical health, which is lacking in our society today. It also provides them with better creative abilities and enhanced mental clarity, so they are able to decide their requirements and to differentiate between need and ambition.

**What is the need to become part of the larger human family?**

In thought everybody is a philosopher, but in action people lack inspiration and motivation. We know what is good, but when it comes to performance, our actions are not for the good of others. For this reason we feel a vacuum and lack of happiness and fulfilment. Swami Satyananda has always said, “You can aspire to become self-realized, you may wish to become a saint, but what is the use of that if it isolates you from people? You can desire peace and try your best to attain it, but if you attain peace, only you will be happy. What use is your personal happiness when thousands around you continue to cry?”

It is this inspiration which has motivated us to work not only for people's spiritual upliftment, but side by side for their material upliftment. Becoming part of this human family is the only way we can share our peace with everyone. We need to learn to maintain that impulse throughout our life. The foundation of the spiritual teachings is to share love, to be compassionate, to be supportive, to encourage and inspire others, to have an optimistic view and to be creative.

**Please tell us about yoga as therapy.**

Yoga is not a therapy. Modern therapy deals with the body while yogic therapy deals with the whole personality. When we are sick, our body is affected, and modern allopathy and other therapies only treat the body. But science is gradually saying that the cause of disease is the mind. Many problems are termed psychosomatic illnesses, like asthma, hypertension, diabetes, even cancer can be classified as psychosomatic. Anything that is not environmental, not viral, not due to pollution, not genetic, can be classified as psychosomatic. When yoga looks at a human body, it does not just see the physical body. It looks at the entire personality, the mental and emotional make-up, the effect of the mind on the body, the effect of emotional sensitivity on the body, and the effect of stress and tension on the body.

In yoga, healing begins through the mind. There is one disease that medical science has not yet picked up, and which is an area of concern in yoga. It is known as DIFS – Disease Induced Fear Syndrome. If a lump appears on your hand, fear says, “I hope it is not cancer. I should have it tested.” If you are told it is malignant, you feel happy that your fears have come true. If you are told it is benign, then you may not believe it and have more tests just to be doubly sure. Fear creates disease in the body. A simple pimple can become malignant due to fear. Advanced cancer can be eradicated completely once you have eliminated fear from your mind. That has been our experience. The classical term for that would be *maya*, the false becoming real.

### **How else does yoga work besides removing the fear?**

Besides removing fear, yoga allows the pranic energy to become balanced. Once this vital force is balanced, many of the physiological and psychological imbalances that are the cause of disease are automatically removed.

### **Are you working towards introducing yoga in schools throughout the country?**

We have been successful in a private way, in our own efforts. We have an organization known as Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal, the Children's Yoga Fellowship. It is a children's organization, run by children and maintained by children. The age group is seven to fourteen years. In that group, we have 300 child yoga teachers, about 500 child yoga instructors and 1,200 child yoga demonstrators. Since 1995, these children have travelled throughout India and trained students in 250 schools. In 1995, the Children's Yoga Fellowship began with only five children. In December 2000, the total strength throughout the country was 45,000 children.

### **INTERVIEW WITH *THE TIMES OF INDIA*, MUMBAI**

### **Do you think that practising yoga will help us avoid, or keep us away from diseases connected with pollution?**

Yoga practices will help build up greater physical immunity, even in a polluted environment. You will be amazed to find out what you can do with yourself through yoga.

### **So you can learn to cope with the environment?**

Yes, that is the main teaching of yoga, coping with the environment and surviving in the environment.

### **Can yoga keep us healthy only through practices and meditation?**

Yoga is not only a series of practices, but also regulation of the lifestyle. We do not emphasize diet in yoga, except that it should be sattvic, simple and easy to digest. Regulation of the lifestyle is mainly a question of attitude and adjustment,

or harmonizing the social lifestyle with our mental or emotional personality. There is no fixed idea about this. It is spontaneous.

**Usually people do more yoga practice than study. Should people study yoga in order to know its perfection, and to lead a harmonious life?**

The study of yoga for personal sadhana is not required. It is the practice that is important. But if you wish to incorporate yoga in your professional life or in different social environments, then the study of yogic concepts and theory is important. It is important to know the scope of yoga and what it thinks about the management of different social and psychological problems, and to provide the inspiration to discover the transcendental state of the personality.

**To perfect yoga, is it necessary to study yoga?**

Yes, because you have to deal with your mind, and the subconscious and unconscious also play an important role in your life.

**What is your advice for the citizens of Mumbai?**

Give yoga a chance in your life!





# Easter Meditation Retreat

Satyananda Ashram, Mangrove Mountain,  
Australia, April 4–8, 2001





# Process of Meditation

There are three stages in meditation. The first stage is *pratyahara*, withdrawing the mind from external objects and stabilizing it internally. The association of the mind with sense objects stops, distractions stop, the outward flow of awareness stops. That is the first stage of meditation. When the mental association with time, space and object stops completely, or partially, and you begin to experience the state of concentration with greater awareness, and you are able to retain that state of one-pointedness, that is known as *dharana*, the second stage in meditation.

The third stage in meditation is *dhyana*, merging the awareness with the state of concentration. Concentration and awareness, which previously were two different things, become one. There is the experience of union between the individual consciousness, which is the seer, the observer, and the cosmic consciousness, which is the experience of transcendence. That is *dhyana*, or meditation.

## **Identifying and withdrawing from external interactions**

When we start the process of meditation, initially we need to identify the areas of our mental associations. Only after identifying these areas are we able to say to ourselves, “Now for ten minutes, fifteen minutes, half an hour, one hour, I am going to withdraw myself. Let the outer experience remain outside, I am not associated with it. My awareness is not in my body. My attention is not in the experiences of the senses

and the body. I am just going to focus, I am just going to concentrate, I am just going to become one-pointed in the practice I am doing, whether it is mantra, or emptying the mind, or filling the mind.”

To come to this state of self-observation naturally takes time. The most difficult thing in meditation is knowing how we relate to and interact with different sense objects, with memories, desires, instincts, impressions. The practices of pratyahara train us to recognize the relationship which exists between manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara. *Ahamkara* is ego, *buddhi* is intellect, *chitta* is memory and *manas* is the process of reflection, thinking about the association and creating a deeper connection with the external sense experiences. In the process of meditation, pratyahara is the most difficult technique because the groundwork has to be done at this level.

Take memories, for example. Suddenly, as the mind relaxes and focuses on something internal, impressions in the form of memories also come up of a childhood experience, of something positive and beautiful, or something negative and traumatic. How do we manage that? Our memory is based on experiences we have received from outside. It is nothing but a collection of sensory experiences, whether physical or mental. If there were no sensory experiences, we would have no memory. The experience of beauty denotes a sensory connection, something we have seen, or felt, or tasted, something we have enjoyed. Enjoyment and aversion indicate sensory connections. Therefore, pratyahara is the basic and the most difficult practice to perfect in the process of meditation.

### **Purging the mind of waste matter**

Once you are focused and one-pointed, you can simply march ahead, without stopping. In the state of pratyahara many times we encounter both the divine and the devil, but not in dharana or dhyana. Therefore, as part of our meditation, there is a need to purge the mind of the external impressions. Our mind is continually receiving impressions from the senses, and they are not being released, not being

purged. Even the most useless experiences have a place in our mind. We become old, yet still remember something that happened to us in our childhood that has no relevance to our age or wisdom. That is extra baggage. Nature tells us exactly the opposite: eat, digest and eliminate is the law of the physical body. You inhale oxygen, you absorb and you eliminate carbon. The physical law is: receive, absorb and throw it out. But this doesn't happen with our mind, which simply receives and receives and receives. Pratyahara, which is the most basic of the yogic meditation practices, aims at eliminating the extra baggage, the waste matter, in the form of thoughts, emotions, memories, attachments, negativity and ego associations.

### **Self-observation**

Three practices are important for us to perfect: asana and pranayama, which there is no need to expand on, and meditation, which needs to be understood properly. Begin the process of meditation by recognizing how you interact with the world, how you speak to a person, how you respond, how you behave, how you express your feelings, in a positive way or in a negative way. That is the beginning of meditation.

Meditation does not begin by sitting down in a posture and closing your eyes. If you sit in a posture and close your eyes to meditate, even then you will see how your nature works. Think of your best friend, and see the content of your emotions, feelings, thoughts and ego associations. Think of a person whom you consider your adversary, and see how you respond, in the form of anger, animosity and negativity. Ask yourself, "What am I experiencing? Is the way I am responding appropriate? Is the way I interact with my friends and adversaries appropriate?" Just have this question in mind.

Recognizing the interactive process is the first condition in order to go deep into the process of transformation which happens during meditation. Therefore, make meditation a part of your life, and encourage others to make meditation a part of their life. But before you encourage others, learn the right method of meditating. This starts with pratyahara.

# Sadhana for Outer Meditation

The first line of the Shanti mantra is: *Asato ma sadgamaya*, which is an affirmation meaning lead me from the unreal to the real. The second line is: *Tamaso ma jyotirgamaya*, meaning lead me from darkness to light. The third line is: *Mrityorma amritam gamaya*, meaning lead me from death to immortality. These mantras are not just philosophical ideas, but indicate a process of human development and growth.

## **Moving from unreal to real**

Let us deal with the first one: lead me from unreality to reality, from *asat* to *sat*. Generally, we think that the world is unreal and that realization is real. But we have to come down from that high level of thinking to something more physical and gross. To illustrate, visualize a large empty jar. Fill up the jar with small pieces of rock about two inches in length, breadth and diameter. Now, in the same jar place smaller pieces of rock or pebbles about a quarter inch in diameter, and shake the jar a little bit. You will find that the quarter inch pebbles will fit in the empty slots between the two inch stones. Is the jar empty or full? Now, put sand in the jar. Sand will simply slide into the empty spaces and fill it up.

That jar is our life. The pieces of rock, big and small, and the sand all represent something different. From the yogic point of view the sand is our mental behaviour in the form of desires, expectations, associations and attachments, the little rocks are our needs and the big rocks are our aspirations.

There can be other interpretations too. Some people may say that the big stones are the things that matter in life, the small stones are the things we think about and the sand is what affects and influences our life. Whatever the interpretation, the fact is that they represent our life.

Here is another image. If you have seen a spider's web, you will know that the circular threads are sticky and the straight threads are non-sticky. The spider moves on the straight threads, not the circular ones, so it does not get stuck in its own web. Life, which has been defined in different traditions as *kala chakra*, the wheel of birth and death, is the movement along the circular threads, and we are stuck in them. The more we try to extract ourselves from the influence of the circle, the more we become entangled. But the spider, which moves on the straight threads, is not caught up in this web of maya. The straight threads represent not only a clear-cut direction and purpose in life, but movement towards that aim. As long as we are moving in that direction we are clear, but the moment we deviate from this straight path, we are stuck.

### **Develop awareness of truth**

What is untruth or false in our life? It goes without saying that our desires are of a temporary nature. They are not a permanent and continuous force of motivation, but change according to the situation and environment. Something that changes and creates a different conditioning of mind at different times is not the real thing. We desire something today and that desire becomes the drive today, but tomorrow that drive has gone and the desire has changed. Expectations also change, so expectations cannot be considered to be real. Associations change, so associations cannot be considered to be real. So many other things change in our life which give us a sense of fulfilment and wellbeing when they are happening, but when they do not happen, there is no longer a sense of fulfilment and wellbeing. It is temporary, not permanent.

When people get married, they feel that they are in love. But what happens to that love after a few years? What causes



husband and wife to move apart? In the beginning, they are the centre of each other's feelings, but after a few years things change and they have moved apart. In this way we find that our identification is always with an external object. Even with the guru, even in spiritual life, the identification is external. So how do we find a way by which we can disconnect from the outer obsession and connect with the real self? This real self is no different from you even now; it is the same and the only one. But it has to be understood from a very practical viewpoint, not from an abstract spiritual viewpoint.

If it were possible to satisfy our hunger by thinking, there would be no need to cook. If it were possible to attain realization just by thinking about it, there would be no need for any kind of tradition, system or path. These traditions and paths represent the transformation of different qualities in the human character. There are three qualities predominant in human beings – head, heart and hands. The head or intellect is the most misused faculty. It is like saying, “I know what is right and wrong, but the environment does not permit me to do the right thing.” That is finding an excuse. The right thing is not always pleasant, just as the truth is not always pleasant. Sometimes the truth can be very harsh because it lays open our nature and exposes us, so people fear the truth.

### **Combine awareness with discrimination**

We cannot find that direction, clarity and connection with our inner self only through awareness. Awareness has to be combined with wisdom, then it becomes a meditative process. Without this combination, meditation is never complete, it is not even being practised. So we have to combine awareness and wisdom to create a meditative state. This meditative state gives us a sense of permanency, stability and clarity.

Sage Patanjali defined it as the systems of pratyahara, dharana and dhyana. Pratyahara is not withdrawal of the senses; it is knowing the senses before extending and expanding them outwards. Before driving a new car, you check the whereabouts of the switches for the lights and windscreen

wipers, the brakes, whether the gears are automatic or manual, and so on. You check everything once to get your bearings, then you are free to drive.

The purpose of pratyahara is to focus the awareness, to know the expressions of the senses, and to allow the senses to work normally. It is not withdrawing the senses. Pratyahara means recognizing the personality, character, mind and attitude. In this process of recognition there has to be wisdom, in the form of discrimination, *viveka*, knowing what to use and when. On a bright sunny day you don't use the windscreen wipers, although the tools are there. Similarly, there is a recognition of your nature which allows you to realize that this association of the mind is of a temporary nature. The association can be personal, social or external. If personal, it can be association with a desire, with an ambition or with the ego. If external, it can be with the family, with friends, with the society, culture and civilization.

Do you move simply because a pattern has been created around you to move in a particular way, like a fly caught in a web, going around and around in a circle and entangling yourself even more? Or do you wish to become a winner by following a clear path where there is no entanglement, but freedom and fulfilment. The path is 'Asato ma sadgamaya', lead me from unreal to real. Pratyahara is 'Asato ma sadgamaya'. It is recognition of our nature, moving from the false identities we have created and the false expectations that have dominated our lives into balance, peace and tranquillity.

### **SWAN principle**

Each character is influenced by strengths, weaknesses ambitions and needs. We have spoken about the SWAN principle many times, but how many people have applied it? Many people think, "What Swamiji says is correct, but in my meditation I go deep inside to experience bliss." However, without recognition of your SWAN, you can never attain a meditative state.

Recognize what your strengths are and connect with them. Recognize what your weaknesses are and remain immune to

them. This does not mean eradicating them, let them be there, but connect with your strengths and don't be influenced by your weaknesses. Recognize what your ambitions and needs are. This filtering process, known as discrimination, *viveka*, can only be experienced if there is awareness. It helps to enhance the faculty of intellect, the appropriate and timely use of the knowledge that is within you. That is the real IQ. *Buddhi* or intellect is the first area to be observed. It is the area where most of our confusion begins and the area where yoga is said to work first.

Sometimes people ask why yoga seems to deal more with the mind and less with the heart. Such questions arise because the process of yoga is not understood. The intellect creates confusion, and there is no clarity in confusion. Yoga says to work with the mind first. Sage Patanjali stated, "Yoga is a system of mind management," but that is only the beginning. We begin to observe the expressions, associations and expectations, the nature and quality of the mind, to deepen the internal awareness. The internal awareness goes beyond the normal pattern of the mind.

There are two distinct patterns of mind, just as there are two distinct uses of the senses. When we walk on land, our legs and arms move in a particular way, but when we swim in the ocean, the same physical organs work differently to keep us afloat. The legs, arms and body are the same, but they express their movements on land and in water in different ways. The surroundings are the factor that influences them.

It is the same with the mind. *Buddhi* is not only a linear, sequential, analytical process; it is also intuitive and inner, knowing and realizing. This is what we have to understand in order to discriminate between our strengths and weaknesses, to connect with our strengths and remain immune to our weaknesses. We also need to know the difference between our ambitions and needs, to fulfil the needs first, and once the needs are fulfilled, in the course of time the ambitions, too, will become fulfilled.

## **Identify short-term goals**

Write down what you consider to be your strengths and weaknesses, ambitions and needs, objectively, with clarity. Work with one strength and one weakness every month. Build up the strength and try to build up immunity to the weakness every month. You are not looking for success or failure, but working to improve the quality of your expressions. You may or may not be able to attain the final goal within a month. Instead of walking ten steps, it is all right to walk only one step. Next month pick another group of strengths and weaknesses. Maybe in five years time you will be better equipped to deal with the first one that you were not able to complete. That is awareness with wisdom, and awareness plus wisdom means meditation.

Deal with the expectations, the relationships and the associations. It is all right to undergo struggle, but know that you are going through it, and accept it. The moment you are able to accept struggle and conflict, they will cease to have a strong influence on your nature. Your nature will remain creative; it will have the clarity to see beyond the struggle.

## **Rules of meditation**

These are the rules of meditation. We have to create the rules before practising meditation. The first rule is: know what is unreal or transitory in nature, and what is the goal or final expectation. It may not be obtainable now, but keep it in focus all the time. It should be a very definite idea. Not 'happiness', because what do you mean by happiness? Do you mean physical happiness, sensorial happiness, sensual happiness, mental happiness, ego happiness? You have to define the level of happiness you are seeking. Keep it in focus, and give yourself the opportunity to clarify your own understanding and expectations.

So the tools we have for moving from *asat* to *sat*, unreal to real, are the SWAN principle, developing awareness and discrimination, and identifying a goal to attain in the short term, not a long-term goal. That will definitely transform the mind and the body and connect you with the spirit.

# Sadhana for Subtle Meditation

When people first come to yoga, most believe they are going to practise hours of asana, pranayama and meditation, awaken their kundalini and become enlightened. When we read certain books, we are led to believe that the practices are important. But the underlying secret is that the attitude is important, not the practice.

## **Develop a positive attitude**

We have to develop a positive attitude. A petty, tamasic mind discusses and criticizes other people, and sees them in terms of likes and dislikes. In yoga, we have to confront this petty mind. Many yogic aspirants are fixated on the idea of sadhana. They say, “I am going to practise sadhana” and if you ask them, “What for?” they say, “Enlightenment.” If you ask them, “What kind of sadhana?” they say, “Well, I would prefer to do hours of meditation or kundalini kriyas if possible.” Most people have expressed this kind of sentiment at some time. However, sadhana has no meaning until there is a positive attitude associated with it.

The petty mind, which is continually thinking of personal enlightenment, sees other people as separate. It reacts against a remark it sees as negative, and so the other person becomes the adversary. Although the aim of yoga is to attain understanding, yogis tend to lack understanding and self-perception and to be over-assertive. Our self-image is external, not internal. We wish to be recognized

by asserting ourselves, not by being ourselves. We feel threatened when somebody ignores our assertiveness and simply walks the other way. That person becomes the bad guy and we express aggression and anger towards them. Where is the understanding? Is the concept of yoga you have been associated with for so many months and years just lost in a moment of crisis? This human weakness has to change or there is no chance for humanity.

### **The eighteen ities**

At the same time, however, there is a spark of hope, which is seen in the development of a positive nature. Positive understanding and qualities come with the development of the appropriate attitude in sadhana. Therefore, the yoga of Swami Sivananda is more relevant today than Sage Patanjali's yoga. The gist of Sivananda yoga has been presented in the 'Song of Eighteen Ities'. The 'ities' are: serenity, regularity, absence of vanity, sincerity, simplicity, veracity, equanimity, fixity, non-irritability, adaptability, humility, tenacity, integrity, nobility, magnanimity, charity, generosity and purity. These qualities represent your understanding of yourself actually manifesting outside. It is not an intellectual understanding. Understanding and experience are worth more than pages of definitions.

The purpose of sadhana is definitely not enlightenment. It is to become aware of your positive self. You may be down, but if you have faith and belief in yourself, the cloud will only be external and not inside your head. Remember that behind every dark cloud there is the shining sun. The eighteen 'ities' of Swami Sivananda represent the highest expression of human character and behaviour, karma yoga, in different situations and circumstances. The purpose of the eighteen 'ities' is to overcome the petty mind, and to find that inner balance and harmony which makes us a human being.

### **Attitude, awareness and discrimination**

Again we come back to attitude. If we feel there is something missing in our life, then we are connecting to our ego. If we

feel that we have gained or attained something, then we are connecting with our spiritual nature. The ego is mundane, the spiritual nature is transcendental. All our life we remain connected to the expressions of ego. Even in meditation, even in samadhi, we relate with our ego; we are looking for ego satisfaction. So what will the ultimate result be if we are looking only for that level of personal fulfilment? We may sometimes be able to have very good experiences, but they will be fleeting. When we find ourselves back in the normal state of mind, then in order to seek pleasure the mind will again crave a similar experience, and thus another conditioning is being created.

If you see God in your meditation today, or have some visions, or see lights and colours which you would not ordinarily see with your normal senses, then you begin to think you have discovered something inside you. Up to that point it is alright, but if in your next sitting, you wish to re-create the same experience, that is not alright. In each sitting, you keep thinking, "I wish I could have the peaceful experience I had one month ago." Here your progress has stopped because you are looking back instead of forward.

You go on a journey and see beautiful scenery, but if you wish to see the same scenery on every subsequent journey, there will be no forward journey at all. You will be stuck in one place. If there is an openness, an expectation to discover the unknown, that breaks the mental conditioning, and you are ready and able to face whatever kind of experiences come up from inside.

Experiences are the outcome of many factors. You have different experiences when you meditate in downtown Sydney and when you meditate in the mountains. The environment becomes a teacher as well. You can never say that one experience is an outcome of a process of meditation. Rather, it is the outcome of a combination of many events and conditions coming together; your sensitivity coming alive, your awareness deepening, your mind focusing, the personality undergoing changes, with the movement from *tamas* to *rajas* to *sattwa*. So it is the attitude, not the practice, that is important.

We have said that awareness plus discrimination equals outer meditation. Now we can add the component of attitude to that formula. Awareness plus discrimination plus attitude equals subtle meditation. Awareness plus discrimination is outer meditation. Attitude takes you one step beyond outer meditation into your deeper nature.

### **Live a positive quality**

Swami Sivananda has defined the kind of attitude one must aim for. If you want to discover serenity, the effort should not remain confined to a meditative practice only. Every moment of our life should express serenity. Serenity does not mean that you lose all motivation, and sit back and say, “I am not attached or affected.” That is not serenity. Serenity is what you feel inside. Love is what you feel inside. If your child is misbehaving, your love for the child does not diminish; it is a continuous expression of your connection, faith and affection. Just as the experience of love is constant between parent and child, similarly serenity has to be constant between yourself and the world. Let the world throw every kind of muck at you, but don’t react. Act, don’t react. Act with serenity, not by sitting back, but knowing that there are different ways to advance in life.

The best approach is to be a farmer. A farmer prepares the ground, plants and nurtures the seeds, and then allows nature to do the work. There is personal effort and involvement, and there is the involvement of nature as well. When both are compatible and in tune with each other, then the product is the fruit of their labour, but if one is not supportive of the other, there is no growth. If nature fails, then human effort has failed and if human effort fails, then nature fails.

### **Connect with your positive self**

A spiritual aspirant has to be like a farmer, not a warrior. A warrior attains victory by leaving behind a trail of suffering, pain, death and destruction, so the victory has no meaning. But a farmer who nurtures and nourishes nature is the ultimate winner because here the human effort and the cosmic



environment interact with each other. There has to be this interaction in the life of a spiritual aspirant, in the form of developing a vision, an attitude towards oneself, in the process of rediscovering yoga in one's life. Practising yoga is asana, pranayama, hatha yoga, raja yoga, bhakti yoga, kriya yoga and kundalini yoga. Discovering yoga is connecting with your positive self. That is the aim of meditation.

Attitude is the process of internal discovery and re-discovery, observing the reactions, or the environment or condition that is creating a reaction, but not reacting. Act with wisdom and honesty. Be honest with yourself, and you will naturally become honest with others. Make an attempt to adopt one 'ity' every month and learn to live by it for some time. You will see that each 'ity' flows into the next naturally and spontaneously, and at the end a butterfly will emerge from the cocoon with wings to fly.

So, initially work on the SWAN principle, use awareness and discrimination to know about yourself. Then add another component. Adopt one attitude and live it along with the SWAN principle, awareness and discrimination. The SWAN principle, awareness and discrimination is one form of meditation. The next form of meditation is awareness, wisdom, attitude and living a quality in life. If you try it, you will be the winner.

# Yoga is Connection

Yoga has been defined as union, and union represents the final attainment in life. However, before we can experience union we have to connect. Connection is more important than union. Union implies bringing together all the faculties, expressions and energies, and merging them. Union implies no division, distinction or duality. We cannot experience this kind of union because our body, mind and consciousness are too divided. Union can be a goal, an aspiration, but to attain this state one has to work very hard, and we do not have the time to work hard for the development of our spiritual life. Those of us who are dynamically involved in the world with commitments and responsibilities cannot experience this union. So we have to fall back on a basic definition of yoga, which is connection.

Connection is the new definition of yoga for this millennium. First, we have to be able to connect. After we have connected, then we can hope to experience glimpses of union. Therefore, it is the connection that we have to think about. With what do we connect? Remember that the body is not only physical, not only composed of senses, not only composed of matter, and the body is not only mind, consciousness or spirit. The human body is like a machine – physical, mental and spiritual.

In this context the term human body does not only mean the physical body, but everything that is contained in our body, everything we experience and express in our life. The

senses are connected with the mind. Are we aware of the influence that the senses have over the mind? Sometimes we are, sometimes we are not. The lower mind is connected with the higher mind, and the higher mind is connected with the transcendental mind. So we are concerned with becoming aware of the connections from body to spirit, recognizing them, improving their quality, developing their energy and balancing them. That is the aim of yoga, not only connecting with ourselves, but with nature and also with the universe.

### **Awareness of action**

According to yogic principles, the mind is divided into two parts. The first is the lower mind, which is influenced by the senses, by circumstances and situations, and which expresses in our day-to-day life. The other aspect is the higher mind, the intuitive mind. We think of ourselves only from the perspective of the lower mind. In the lower mind, we realize that there are desires, aspirations, hopes, wishes, expectations and motivations. All these expressions of the lower mind are like little motors which, when they start, begin the activity in our life.

However, the lower mind is also subject to the influences of prakriti or nature, not the nature we see around us, but the nature that is universal. In Sanskrit, the word *prakriti* means the energy or force responsible for an action. In the manifest dimension, you cannot live without some kind of activity. You cannot escape action. Even if you are in the mountains in isolation, in solitude, activity is part of your being. The form changes, but the process goes on. In society, in the family, in the ashram, in solitude, in public, action is constant. Only the form of expression changes. This continual action, which is the foundation of life, is prakriti.

The third chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita* is devoted to karma yoga. Karma yoga is not the yoga of physical external action. It is the yoga of recognizing the action that is happening at all the different levels of human personality. It is directing and channelling the activity that is happening through our senses, our mind, our emotions, and through subtle, intuitive

levels. That is karma yoga. The spiritual traditions have emphasized the need to understand our participation in life, in society. Awareness of action is the beginning of spiritual life, not negation of action. It is the gross mind, the lower mind, which is involved in continuous action.

### **Connecting with the higher mind**

However, there is another aspect of ourselves to which we aspire, another condition and another time. That is when the higher mind momentarily expresses itself as a flash of intuition, wisdom, human empathy or human creativity. So the shift is to move from the lower mind to the higher mind. That mind management is the concept of Sage Patanjali's yoga.

What is attained after managing the mind? Right now we identify with the lower mind, but after managing the mind we identify with the higher mind. We become the *drashta*, the seer. Sage Patanjali's first sutra is: *Atha yoganushasanam* – yoga is a form of personal discipline. The second sutra is: *Yogaschitta vritti nirodhah* – with the attainment of personal discipline, we are able to manage our lower mind. The third sutra is: *Tada drashtuh swaroope'vasthanam* – once we are able to manage our lower mind, we become established in our true nature, the higher mind. In the first three sutras the direction of yoga has been very clearly given. This is the traditional view of yoga. Yoga is not about self-realization. The concept of self-realization may have come into yoga due to the inclusion of samadhi in the ashtanga yoga system, but in the actual meaning and definition of yoga there is no concept of spiritual illumination.

So the entire thrust of yoga practice is to move from the lower mind to the higher mind. We have been given the tools to attain this: by perfecting asana, by practising pranayama, by experiencing states of pratyahara, sense withdrawal, by experiencing dharana, focusing the mind, and by experiencing dhyana, becoming aware of the internal experience, which is not sensorial, not external, and which has nothing to do with identification or association with sense objects.

According to Sage Patanjali's concept, *dhyana*, meditation, is realizing, understanding and becoming aware of the expressions of the higher mind. The practices that deal with the lower mind are *dharana*, focusing, and *pratyahara*, knowing the connection of the mind with the sense objects and withdrawing them. Once we have moved from identification with the lower mind to identification with the higher mind, then the practice of yoga really begins. Until then, yoga is an external form of practice. After *dharana*, yoga becomes an internal practice. *Dhyana*, meditation, is an internal practice, and it is also a state of inner purification and inner harmony.

### **Finding a balance**

What is the harmony, bliss and peace that we talk about in yoga? Is it just a concept or is it something that we can understand and appreciate in our lives. Harmony, bliss and peace are not concepts. Harmony implies that all the motors of our body and our personality function in balance with each other. If the harmony of the body is disturbed, illness is experienced. If the respiratory, cardiovascular or other systems of the body go out of gear, we have to bring them back into shape. As long as there is physical harmony, there is health, but when the physical harmony is disturbed, there is ill health.

Of course, the seed of harmony already exists in the physical body, and in the same way it already exists in the mind. If we are swayed by our emotions or our desires, or if we become obsessed with something, we get disturbed. But there have been times when each one of us has taken a step back and observed whether it is our need, our desire, or our ambition. When we have realized what the mental expressions have been, we have been able to maintain mental harmony. So the seed of harmony is also in the mind. Recognizing the nature, observing our participation and interaction in the world around us and living appropriately is the concept of harmony, peace and joy. It is not about laughing all the time, or being serious all the time, or being introverted all

the time. It is about finding a balance in all our expressions, which leads to peace, bliss and harmony.

### **Combine action with wisdom**

Initially, in order to train the gross mind, the lower mind, yoga utilizes the concepts of hatha yoga, raja yoga, jnana yoga, etc., and in order to express the higher mind, yoga utilizes karma yoga, not dhyana, not meditation. Remember that karma yoga is not the yoga of physical activity; it is awareness of the activity that is taking place with or without your knowledge, continually and eternally, from the time you were born until the time you die. Once you are aware of this karma, this ongoing activity, and you are able to combine it with your wisdom, then you will become established in the higher mind. Sage Patanjali's yoga is a practice to transform the lower mind.

In the new millennium yoga is not taking a different direction; it is the human perception that has to take the appropriate step. For example, you can change the sentence, "God is nowhere" into "God is now here" by simply shifting the letter 'w'. Can you make that shift in your life? It is easy to nod your head and say yes, but it is difficult to do because it is not an intellectual concept. It is a practical experiment that you have to make. Yoga is an experiment to change your perception and to convert your understanding into applied wisdom. If yoga can take this step in your life, then this is the direction that we will go in this new millennium.

### **Connect with the universe through yajna**

After establishing oneself in the higher mind, connection begins to take place with the environment, with prakriti, the universal nature. We have to take responsibility for improving prakriti. Just as we have improved our personal prakriti, we have to improve the outer prakriti. This is done through yajna, which is also part of yoga. *Yoga* means connection, and *yajna* means awareness of the divine power around us. It means making the effort to purify the mind, the senses and the external environment. It means developing the ability to give.

Giving is not charity. Just as we want to receive all the time, we must be willing to give all the time. What do we give? Sympathy has no meaning for those who are suffering; they need support, encouragement and teaching. Remember the old saying, “If someone is hungry, don’t just give him fish to eat, but teach him how to fish, so that there is no hunger at all.” That is what teaching is about. Giving is teaching, giving is understanding and giving is appreciation. These are the components of yajna. The outcome of yajna is personal purification, alignment of the personal energies with the cosmic energies, and connection.

### **Develop selfless attachments**

Paramahamsaji was once asked, “How do we expand our awareness?” He said the simplest thing, “Extend the area of your attachments and participation.” If you put a drop of ink into an empty glass, you will be able to see it as one drop. But if you add a drop of ink to a glass full of water, the ink will spread and become diluted. In the same way, if you empty a bottle of black ink in the ocean, after a few seconds you will no longer be able to see the ink. Our associations are like that. Our attachments are with the few people we consider to be our immediate family. If your child and three of his friends are hurt in a car accident, your priority will be your child, not his friends. But if this same attachment, which reflects selfishness, is spread over many, many people, it will reflect selflessness. You are able to give equal attention to everyone. When you give attention to one, it is selfishness, but when you give attention to thousands, it is selflessness.

One way to overcome attachment is to expand your areas of attachment, and then it becomes selfless attachment. Of course, you are still attached through a feeling, through awareness, but it is positive attachment, not attachment in the negative sense. When Paramahamsaji expressed this idea, many people said it was wonderful, but nobody thought about it a second time. However, the more you think about it and the more you understand it, the more you will realize that there is real truth in it because it helps to improve the quality

of the mind and perceptions. A person who is able to have that level of vision and understanding expresses the higher mind in their life.

### **Take responsibility and act for the good of others**

Look at the masters who have walked upon this planet. What do we see in their lives? Were they good speakers, were they good thinkers or were they good performers? They were good performers; they developed ideas and they acted on them. You can say that the lower mind discusses people, the intermediate mind, the middle mind, discusses events, and the higher mind develops ideas and performs. The lower mind criticizes: “I like this person,” “I don’t like that person.” When one person suddenly becomes the focus of attention, you rip that person to shreds with your thoughts, feelings, emotions and expressions. The lower mind always discusses a person or an object. The intermediate mind is more objective, it discusses events. The higher mind develops ideas and performs, and we see this in the lives of great people.

When you do not have clarity of mind, you think that a person or an event is important, not developing an idea or performing. If you analyze your entire life objectively, how much time have you spent thinking about other people? About seventy percent. How much have you thought about events that have encouraged and inspired you? About twenty-five percent. How much have you thought about developing ideas and performing? Almost non-existent, maybe five percent. We can wish for and desire many things, but wishing and desiring is not enough. This is where yoga comes in.

Yoga gives the understanding and awareness that it is now time to perform, to act and take responsibility for yourself. The combination of yoga and yajna is the direction of yoga in the new millennium. This is how we develop the wisdom to change the negative sentence, “God is nowhere,” to the positive sentence, “God is now here!” If you can do that, then you are a true yogi.



## Havan and Initiation

Our havan is devoted to the Cosmic Mother. During the havan, we will chant the mantras: Aim, Hreem, Kleem, which are the *bija*, or seed, mantras of shakti. *Aim* is for wisdom, *Hreem* for prosperity and wellbeing, and *Kleem* is the power of transformation. The mantras are chanted as follows: Om Aim Hreem Kleem, Aim Hreem Kleem, Aim Hreem Kleem, Swaha. While 'swaha' is said, the people sitting around the fire will offer the samagri to the fire. Prior to the commencement of the havan, we will repeat all together the Mahamrityunjaya mantra and the Gayatri mantra eleven times each. When you are chanting the mantras, you have to concentrate at ajna chakra. You have to generate the vibration of the mantra inside the region of ajna chakra, inside the head. Once you get into the swing of it, it creates a very dynamic vibration inside.

During the chanting everyone will be sprinkled with special water from Manasarovar, Mount Kailash, the abode of Shiva. It is an act of purification, known as *prokshan*. At the same time incense will be placed at the four cardinal points: north, east, south and west. Each person will also receive a *tika*, the dot to identify ajna chakra.

Now, become still and silent, physically and mentally. Connect yourself with the body, the environment, the earth, the sky. We will chant the vedic shanti mantras to invoke the cosmic energies and after the invocation is complete the fire will be lit and the havan will be performed. While the

chanting is going on, maintain awareness of physical stability and mental peace. Experience the vibration of the mantras internally. The same vibrations which you feel inside with the chanting of the mantras, direct them outwards, around you, into your immediate environment. What you hear through your ears goes into the body and comes out as sentiment, as feeling, as good vibes from the heart.

### **Inner purification**

There are two types of ecology, internal and outer. Yajna or havan helps to harmonize the internal and the outer environments. There is mental pollution, mental constipation. The law of life is that what you consume, you eliminate, otherwise there is trouble. But that doesn't happen with our mind. We also consume through our mind, but there is no release and we are mentally constipated. Mental constipation is fixation on an idea. Sometimes there is mental diarrhoea too, which identifies a person as being unstable, because there is no connection with the inner self. We have tried to control the mind, but we have never made an attempt to cleanse the mind.

Yajna is the process of cleansing the mind through the chanting of mantras, through connecting yourself with nature, the elements, the environment and experiencing the purity which is outside and also inside. The environment is beautiful, the air, the wind and the water are full of purity. Connect with that purity, and forget the negativity in life. If you want to transform yourself, if you want to change yourself, if you want to attain something in life, protect the good that is in you. Do not express the bad, which is mental rubbish. Aggression and anxiety are mental rubbish. This is where discrimination, *viveka*, comes in.

Awareness and understanding come with discrimination. Without discrimination, which is the foundation of awareness and understanding, they will not come alive in our life. Discrimination, understanding and awareness take you to serenity. If you are able to maintain serenity, not for an hour or a day, but so that it becomes part of your nature, then it

will lead you to divinity. This inner purification and inner cleansing is the purpose of havan, re-alignment of the inner ecology, the inner nature.

### **Initiation**

Havan is a very good beginning for initiation, because the first samskara of initiation is purification. Don't think you have become spiritual today because you have been initiated. Rather you are starting on a journey where your *purushartha* or effort has to be predominant. Yoga says there are four *purusharthas* or efforts we have to make in life: artha, kama, dharma and moksha.

*Artha* is working to obtain external security, financial and social security. *Kama* is working to fulfil our ambitions, aspirations and desires. *Dharma* is working to know the difference between just and unjust, right and wrong, positive and negative and connecting ourselves with what is just and positive. *Moksha* is trying to overcome or go beyond the self-made boundaries we have created within ourselves and which have stopped our growth.

When you are initiated, remember that you are being initiated into dharma. You have to make an effort to connect with the positivity in life. When the day is dark and dreary and the way is hard to find, just keep this thought in mind. It is better to light one little candle than to stumble in the dark, all we need is a tiny spark. Initiation is that tiny spark and the candle is your spirit.

Some guidelines have been given as to your future direction, which involve the cultivation of certain positive qualities. Each month work with a different quality. You may succeed or you may fail, but failure should not deter you and success should not give you a big head. Be like a blade of grass that can bend in any direction when the wind blows over it and again become upright when there is no wind. Don't try to become a tree which can snap when there is a strong wind, but be flexible.

The initiation is a connection of trust. If you can trust yourself, and if you can have a goal to attain in life, then

that will lead you on. The initiation is given with the hope that you will be able to create this trust and belief in yourself, in your convictions and aspirations. I wish you well in your initiation, in your sadhana, in your effort. May the grace of God, the blessings of the masters, guide you with wisdom and clarity.

# Yoga Ecology

Yoga ecology teaches us how to live in harmony with nature, to maintain the balance of nature and the balance within ourselves. In both the vedic tradition and modern physics, there is the unified field theory, which states that every cell of our body is interconnected. Similarly, there is a connection between every life form on this planet. We are not isolated individual beings. For example, we are connected through the breath and the air we breathe. Today we may be breathing the same air exhaled by Christ, Mohammed and Sri Krishna, and many others. We are connected to the past and the future by living in the present. The same connection exists with the planet and creation. If the earth were to blow up, the solar system would definitely be affected and each planet would feel the earth's destruction. If our solar system is destroyed, the galaxy will also be destroyed and so on. If our galaxy is destroyed, other galaxies will be affected. An ecological balance has to be maintained.

In the vedic culture, systems of personal, global and universal healing were practised. The ancient vedic rishis and seers were the scientists of their times, and when science has a spiritual bent, it leads to the development of civilization. They said that one has to live in harmony with the cosmic self, and devised practical ways of avoiding ecological disasters and maintaining the natural balance of the planet and its relationship with the universe. Their

vision was that if the tattwas and life forms of the planet are in harmony, that effect spreads throughout the entire universe. They devised certain methods which influenced the personality and the environment, inducing harmony and removing imbalances. These methods included upasanas, havans and yajnas, which are not just rituals, but processes of trying to unite the life form of this body with the universal body.

In that process it is the *matri shakti* or feminine force with which one has to connect. We are born from a feminine body and our first contact and associations are with our mother. Similarly, the universe came out of *hiranyagarbha*, the golden womb. Birth represents an extension of the feminine force. The entire world was created, nurtured and sustained by *matri shakti*. Similarly, the quality of goodness is recognized as representing the feminine force. In Sanskrit, sympathy, love, compassion and the ability to nurture are all feminine qualities. All the good qualities of life are feminine in nature. *Prakriti*, cosmic energy, *srishti*, creation, and *shakti*, energy, the powers of creation, are also feminine. When we invoke that power, we connect with the goodness in life. We begin to sympathize with the effect of the wrongs and try to make them right.

This is not the first time in human history that our planet has undergone a crisis. Every civilization has had problems, whether it was air pollution, water pollution or overpopulation, and yet the earth has always found a way to maintain its balance. In each *yuga* or age, there has been growth and decline. This is the cycle of the world. One lights a flame to dispel fear and ignorance. In the immediate vicinity there is light, but as you go further away the light diminishes, until you cannot see it at all. Similarly, events are seen in the darkness of time and space. As we move further away from them in the course of time, they are remembered as experiences, then as history, then as myth and later forgotten. Yajna is a point of light in the up-swing and downswing of civilization.

## Communicating with nature

Yajna is not just the fire ceremony. Real yajna is expressing your sentiments and identifying with the object of worship. Tree pooja is also a form of yajna. When we perform tree pooja, we are coming in contact with nature. This *sambandh*, contact or communication, has to happen for spiritual development. Communication is being able to interact with the environment with inner sensitivity. If you see someone suffering on the side of the road, you may choose to go and help. If you see a withered plant in need of water, you may choose to give it water or to ignore it. Even a simple act like giving water is a form of communication. You are conveying your sympathy and compassion, and that is what is received. In this case words have no meaning.

Human beings have the ability to communicate with each and every part of creation in a non-verbal manner, but we are so used to communicating through speech that we have lost our non-verbal skills. In prakriti, or nature, the same energy and spirit is flowing in all aspects of creation. So the communication between your life force and the life force inherent in others is not mental, intellectual or verbal, but communication of thoughts and feelings. In yoga ecology, the first attempt is to communicate and have empathy with nature, not to misuse nature, but to enhance the beauty, growth and birth of nature.

Many people have experimented with non-verbal communication. The members of Findhorn in the United Kingdom were interested in communicating with plants, trees, flowers, etc., because they believed it was possible to awaken the spirit of the *devas*, the illumined beings, within. In *Stalking the Wild Pendulum*, the physicist Isaac Bentov spoke of the energy being awakened in a lifeless rock through worship and prayer over centuries. He discovered the simple principle of non-verbal communication. Spiritual masters have understood this connection and expressed it, not in a scientific manner, but through the same experience. They have come to the same conclusion – the mind is energy.

The body is matter, the senses are expressions of matter, but the mind, thoughts, feelings, emotions and spirit are all

energy. Communication happens in the realm of energy, in the non-material dimension. Energy simply brings into play the inherent nature that already exists in different things. When two pieces of wood are rubbed together, a spark is created and then fire. Fire was created because it was inherent in wood. Similarly, when you are able to develop empathy with a plant, a tree or any other object of creation, you are connecting your energy with it. The energy inherent in that tree comes alive, which is the principle of yoga ecology.

### **Tree pooja**

In order to develop this energy communication, we start with tree pooja, which is the first step in yoga ecology. It is a very simple act. Try to choose the weakest tree, so that you can see how it responds to tree pooja after one month. Every day at sunset, light a small candle or an oil flame in front of the tree, place a flower there, light a stick of incense and pour a small bowl of water at the base of the tree. Then for ten seconds close your eyes. Become that tree. If the tree is sick, feel the sickness of the tree and say a prayer for its wellbeing. “May you become strong and healthy. May you become well to nurture life.” After some time the tree will become healthier and stronger. If you continue with this practice with full belief, trust and compassion, you will understand the tree is responding to your actions. Of course, the process has to be developed; it cannot happen in a day or a week. You have to fine-tune the frequency of your brain to receive the waves being transmitted by the tree.

This is the beginning of your connection with nature – not just admiring the tree, but feeling a connection. A great sense of satisfaction and fulfilment comes, happiness and hope come. That is the spirit of yoga ecology. Some movements say hug a tree. The Satyananda yoga ecology movement says adopt a tree, worship a tree, be one with the tree, feel for the tree. Although tree pooja looks simple, it has a deep meaning, because it is worshipping Mother Earth, the source of all nourishment and life. Tree pooja is a way of honouring and remembering that transition where matter is no longer



inert but contains a spark of life and consciousness. It is also a way of connecting oneself with nature, and through nature with the divine.

## **Yajna**

After tree pooja, the next component of yoga ecology is yajna. Yajna is a process of cleansing the mind through the chanting of mantras, through connecting oneself with nature, the elements and the environment, and experiencing the external purity internally.

To teach the science of yajna, first we have to understand the ingredients used, the properties of the herbs and wood, the properties contained in the ash and the smoke, and their effect on the environment. We need to discover from the tradition which ingredients purify the air in a particular way and create a balance in the atmospheric conditions. Just as burning a handful of chillies can create a drastic change in the environment, a handful of other herbs can help to purify the environment. Each mixture of herbs and woods used during yajna has its own properties. Some remove toxins from the body upon inhalation, some uplift the mind, some bring about balance in the motor and sensory nervous systems, some help to destroy the pollutants that we breathe in from the environment. It is possible to induce a change in the mental patterns and attitudes, to heal illnesses and diseases of the body by using certain combinations of wood and herbs in a yajna.

The vedic seers recognized that yajna, upasana and havans are the means of identifying with the universe. There was an understanding of how to maintain ecological balance. They knew which herbs would cleanse and purify the soul, the air and the water. In the vedic age every household performed small yajnas, or *sandhyas*, three times a day with the smoke curling up into the atmosphere in the heavens. By burning different combinations of herbs and wood, smoke is created, which rises and combats air pollutants.

In the past, yajna was the accepted way of creating a balance in the environment. There is a scientific theory which

postulates that the sulphur dioxide resulting from volcanic eruptions rises and eventually counteracts the effects of excess carbon dioxide already in the atmosphere. What are considered to be toxic fumes can actually counterbalance the pollution we have put into the environment.

Swami Satyananda has said, “Forty years ago, when I was investigating the need of society, I decided yoga would play a vital role. Today yoga has become a common word throughout the world. Now the time has come to start teaching the tradition, system and process of yajnas and havans, because that will be the need of society in this century.”

According to the vedic tradition, yajna has three components: deva pooja, worship of the divine; prakriti, connection with nature; and participation of the individual as the worshipper. Yajna creates an environment where you are in tune with yourself and nature. Yajna is not a religious activity or ritual. The tradition speaks of over two hundred different kinds of yajna: to improve the quality of the soil, the quality of the air, to bring forth rain, for progeny, etc.

In India, a centre for yajna research has used the ash from yajna to fertilize barren soil. In Munger, some local farmers also experimented with ash from the Sat Chandi Yajna. A handful of eggplant seeds were covered with ash overnight and then planted beside a row of seeds not exposed to the ash. The seeds dipped in ash grew much taller and were more full-bodied than the normal seeds. Chemicals damage the soil. A study comparing the quality of soil in India and in the USA concluded that the soil in the USA had the capacity to feed the entire world for fifty years, whereas the soil in India could feed the entire world for two hundred years, because the agrarian culture in India used natural fertilizers rather than chemicals which diminish the soil's vitality.

### **Role of yoga ecology**

The vedic tradition emphasized the importance of living naturally. Living naturally does not mean that you leave all the comforts and luxuries and ‘go bush’. It means understanding nature, caring for nature, supporting nature, encouraging

nature to perform its duties by maintaining this subtle balance. A different type of mentality has to be developed to sensitize people to the process of *upasana* or worship. The selfish, consumer mentality may give pleasure for a few years or a lifetime, but the destruction that happens to human society and to the planet is irreversible. We are overly conscious of ourselves and, as a result, fail in our interactions with other people and nature. How can we expect then to interact with the divine nature? Spirituality becomes only a philosophy, not a part of people's lives. As a result, we have been unable to maintain a connection with the divine, transcendental power, and that has left us weak.

Our main role is to act as catalysts to improve, not destroy, the quality of our existence. Although a lot is being done to preserve and protect nature and to discover alternate sources of energy, there has been irreversible damage to the environment. Planting trees and preserving what is left of the rain forests is not the real solution. We can help to purify the atmosphere, but we cannot replenish what has been lost.

Today, nature is no longer our home. Urbanization, concrete jungles and polluted environments are our home, and we call this progress. As time passes, human beings lose contact with nature. That is the trend of modern civilization because we have been misusing nature and natural resources for our own satisfaction and gain. In this way we are killing our own planet as well as ourselves. If there is no mother, then there are no sons and daughters.

The devastation happening around the world at all levels has to be recognized, not in a political manner but in a more humane manner. There is no use trying to change the laws, because laws are not pro-human, they are pro-society, pro-civilization. There seems to be a clash between humanity and civilization. We can become human beings again by connecting with nature. Nature connects us to the transcendental, the divine, the cosmos. This is the attempt of yoga ecology – to connect and, where we can, to rectify the imbalances we have created. Through yoga ecology we can learn how to rejuvenate and revitalize nature around us.

# Yoga for Health and Inner Harmony

Playa de Aro, Barcelona, Spain  
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# Yoga for Health and Inner Harmony

The subject of our seminar is yoga for health and inner harmony. It is heartening to see the growth of yoga throughout the world, especially in Spain. Thirty or forty years ago people had no idea what yoga was and it was viewed as an eastern philosophical, religious belief. However, many people have worked very hard to give yoga a more scientific framework, and the seeds which were planted many years ago in different parts of the world have now sprouted. Today yoga is understood as a method by which we can attain total harmony in all dimensions of the personality.

Health is not fighting disease, but managing our lives in order to experience wellbeing. This is also the understanding of modern medical professionals. The World Health Organization has defined health as physical, mental, emotional, moral and spiritual wellbeing. Here we have the five components which represent the development of the total human personality.

This idea originally derived from yoga. In Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, we find eight limbs of yoga, dealing with the different facets of our nature. The first two limbs, yama and niyama, deal with human character and behaviour and the moral personality. The third and fourth limbs, asana and pranayama, deal with the body. Next comes mind management, which is dealt with through the practices of pratyahara and dharana, the fifth and sixth limbs. Awareness of spiritual life is experienced through the seventh limb,

meditation or dhyana. The eighth limb is samadhi., the culmination of meditation.

Yoga has always believed that three components are important in the human character: the intellect, the emotions and the ability to act, representing the qualities of the head, heart and hands. Integration of these qualities is the aim of yoga.

### **Physical yoga**

When we buy a car, we receive a manual telling us when the car needs to be serviced and what type of service is required. If we do not have the car serviced at the right time, it will deteriorate and the life of the car will be reduced. Our body is like a car, but we have never taken it to be serviced. As a result, various problems occur, which are known as disease. Sometimes the brakes fail, sometimes the gears jam, sometimes the oil burns dry. We experience similar conditions in our physical body due to misuse. We tend to ignore the imbalances that occur because we are unable to see where the fault lies. The final outcome is chronic illness. If we can manage little imbalances when they arise, we can avoid chronic situations. Yoga teaches us to recognize the state of the body and learn how to become friends with the body. If we misuse and abuse the natural body, there will be infirmity and stress, and eventually a major problem will arise.

### **Mental yoga**

It is the same with the mind. Once there was a very well trained monkey, who looked after all the king's needs. When the king slept, the monkey fanned him. When the king walked, the monkey went ahead as his bodyguard with a sword in his hand. One day, while the king was sleeping, a fly landed on his forehead. The monkey brushed it away, but it landed on the king's ear, then his nose. This continued for a few minutes with the monkey trying to shoo the fly away so that the king could rest undisturbed. Ultimately, the monkey became frustrated and decided to kill the fly.

He picked up his sword and when the fly landed on the king's throat, the monkey brought his sword down. You can guess the result!

Our mind is like that monkey. The mind becomes our close confidant, but when there are problems it cannot manage, the mind becomes frustrated and brings out the sword, leading to wounds in many places. The psychological and emotional problems and the personality imbalances are the result of a mismanaged monkey or a mismanaged mind. The problem is that in modern society, the monkey has adopted different habits. Just imagine the nature of a drunken monkey that is unable to be still for five minutes, and is then bitten by a scorpion. That is the state of our mind today. The monkey mind is drunk with ambitions, desires and expectations, stung by failure and success. It is a very disturbed mind.

Yoga relaxes and harmonizes the mind by developing awareness, by developing the powers of observation, by teaching us how to manage life's different situations with greater clarity, by identifying with wisdom. This is the process of mental yoga. Servicing the physical body is the process of physical yoga. Balancing and tranquillizing the mind is the process of mental yoga. Yoga has two main functions: it is both a preventive science and a promotive science. It prevents imbalances from affecting the body, personality and performance, and it also promotes a sense of wellbeing, confidence and vitality. These are the two components of yoga that need to be understood in today's context.

### **Practical self-realization**

Yoga is not meant for self-realization. Some people may wonder at this statement, but if we look at the yogic traditions, including Sage Patanjali, we can reach a conclusion that yoga does not advocate self-realization in terms of understanding the spirit and the cosmic force, or in terms of union between the individual consciousness and the higher consciousness. However, it does advocate self-realization in terms of realizing one's nature, personality and character.



It is like a blind person wanting to see the sun when the real need is to have eyes. If you have eyes, you can see not only the sun, but the entire creation in all its glory and beauty. It is the same with yoga. You do not need to develop concepts or beliefs to define the spirit, the individual self and the higher self. You need the wisdom to know the role you have to play in life in order to grow, progress or evolve. Attainment of this understanding can be called personal or self-realization in its most practical form. Ultimately, God-realization is an attainment that happens naturally; you do not have to try to attain it. Just as a headache is a symptom of stress in the body, mind and brain, in the same way God-realization is a symptom of having attained inner balance and harmony.

### **Recognizing the inner state**

Sage Patanjali's statements in the *Yoga Sutras* represent the process of realizing oneself from inside the mind. The first statement is: *Yogaschitta vritti nirodhah*, yoga is controlling the modifications of the mind. It is a process of developing awareness of how our mind and personality interact. This interaction with oneself, with the environment and society creates responses and reactions known as *vrittis*, modifications. Can we manage them? Can we manage our interactions with others? Can we manage the negative and positive results of our actions and interactions? Can we understand our expectations and desires and how they motivate our nature and personality? Are we able to distinguish between our ambitions and our needs?

Chitta vritti is a state of mental illness. Just as the body is affected by illnesses such as asthma, diabetes, hypertension and indigestion, the mind is affected by anger, hatred, jealousy, aggression and attachment. In yoga these mental disturbances are identified as vrittis. Depression, anxiety and stress are external symptoms of something which has happened to you internally, symptoms of a state of mind which has already transformed you internally. We treat our depression and anxiety as if it is coming from outside, without

being aware of what we have actually felt inside. We identify with the reaction that is taking place externally.

This is where the preventative role of yoga comes in. Through a wide variety of practices and techniques, yoga allows you to recognize the inner state of your mind, body and emotions. It allows you to guide the expressions of your nature and personality. It allows you to develop immunity to the negative influences of life. Yoga allows you to become more self-observant, and in time this self-observation becomes spontaneous, a habit, part of your nature.

### **Natural awareness**

When you drive a car, even though you may be talking to somebody and looking around, your awareness is on the road. It is a natural awareness that is being expressed. You do not have to stare at the road with full intensity all the time. Why don't we apply the same principle when we are practising yoga, when we are meditating, when we are realizing our inner nature?

It is a natural trait that when we try to do something to change ourselves internally, we become too obsessive about it and lose the natural spontaneity that can manifest. We tend to struggle in order to win. A flowing river does not struggle against anything. If there is a large rock, it will bypass the rock, not fight it. But we think, "Why is that rock there? What is the best way to shatter it into a thousand pieces?" It is an obsession that comes when we see an obstacle in our path and worry about it.

In this context, yoga leads to freedom from obsessions. If you can overcome your obsessions, you will attain realization, because an obsessive nature is most difficult to change. Even a desire can become obsessive. The masters have said that in the end you also have to let go of the desire to attain freedom. One has to become natural. There should be no identification with anything that binds you to an idea, a belief or a system.

We are conditioned to think and act in a certain way, and anything that does not fall into that condition is seen as

alien and different. When we are working with ourselves, we have to discover the conditionings that tie us down. When we are able to understand what ties us down and make an attempt to free ourselves from those ties, then we become relaxed.

We think we are in bondage, but in reality we are not. We think we desire peace, but in reality we do not. Recognizing the conditions that influence us is the primary step in yoga, not asana, not pranayama, not meditation and not samadhi. Meditation has no meaning if you are not able to manage yourself. Samadhi has no meaning if you are not able to understand yourself. Asanas have no meaning if you are not able to connect with the body. It is the connection with the self that is important.

### **Yoga – the culture of today**

Yoga can be defined as connection. In the last few years, yoga has taken many steps forward. It is inspiring to see that practitioners of yoga have been able to transcend their own needs and become part of society. It is inspiring to see that people have transcended body awareness, and are using yoga not for personal emancipation, but to help others in society. Today, yoga has become a part of society. In the past people practised yoga to feel good, but now they practise yoga not only for themselves, but also to improve the quality of life in society. When Swami Satyananda established the Bihar School of Yoga in Munger in 1963, he made the proclamation, “Yoga is the culture of tomorrow.” A new millennium has come into being, and we can definitely say that yoga is becoming the culture of today.

This gathering in Spain is an important milestone in the history of yoga. Satyananda Yoga has been taught in Spain since 1975, and it is heartening to see that representatives from many different traditions and branches of yoga have gathered in the spirit of yoga to connect and to share their understanding and experiences. This is the first meeting of the Satyananda Yoga tradition in Spain, and it is definitely a beginning full of potential.

In 1979 and 1980, I was in Barcelona teaching at the Satyananda ashram. Then there was a long gap, but the yoga tradition remained strong. It touched a chord in people's lives, and today we see these people teaching and representing yoga. We express our solidarity with those who have kept the light of yoga alive in this country. This light will soon become a raging fire. Maybe it is already happening, but let us see what happens in the future. The Spanish personality is appropriate for yoga. Once upon a time they were the conquistadors and we hope they will become 'conquisatodoros del espiritu', spiritual conquistadors, in this coming age. We look forward to a new growth, a new beginning and a new path that we can walk together.

# The Importance of Karma Yoga

Yoga has always been thought of as a series of practices to be done away from the situations of normal social life – in a classroom environment, or in a retreat in the company of ‘spiritual’ beings. We think that if we practise a particular yoga technique, we will achieve a particular result. What we have actually done is to make yoga into a mechanical process leading to self-awareness. We have to move away from this idea and make yoga a part of our natural expression. Only then can yoga become a process leading to self-realization.

If we practise yoga to feel good, then we will definitely feel good for a little while. If we practise yoga to relax, then we will relax. If we practise yoga to connect with ourselves internally, then that will also become possible. But whatever the attainment may be, it will be momentary, a transitory phase, and when we have to confront life’s realities, tensions and frustrations again, the effects of yoga will take a back seat. Therefore, it needs to be understood that the real experience of yoga happens through karma yoga. Even if you practise hatha yoga, raja yoga, kundalini or kriya yoga, you have to combine it with karma yoga in order to have an enriching experience of the process.

Some people have the idea that karma yoga has no relevance in their lives, that it is only hard work. Some think that karma yoga is only service to guru, God or humanity. Some think of karma yoga as selfless service or selfless action. None of these definitions represents the real spirit of karma

yoga, because karma is an integral part of our personality and life. People have translated karma as action. It has also been defined as cause and effect. Neither of these definitions is true. It has to be understood that the whole of life is karma and if you avoid karma, then you do not exist.

### **Nature's expression of karma**

Nature expresses karma through the elements. The heat of fire is the karma of fire. The expansiveness of space is the karma of space. The movement of the wind is the karma of air. The liquid nature of water is the karma of water. The solidity of earth is the karma of soil. Desires, expectations and thoughts are karmas of the mind. The expressions of the senses are karmas of the body. In fact, we are homogeneous karma. The whole world is homogeneous karma, the whole of creation is homogeneous karma.

Understand that karma is not only cause and effect, not only action. Karma is a subtle ripple-like movement affecting all dimensions of creation. Karma is movement that happens in the body via the senses and in the mind via the mental projections and experiences. If you practise asana, you are altering the karma of the body. If you practise pranayama, you are altering the karma of vitality and the brain. If you practise meditation, you are altering the karma of the subtle mind and of the spirit. This is the way to manage the karmas which influence us in either a positive or a negative way. Karma is awareness of the movement of life. It is not hard work, not service, not cause and effect. It is an understanding of how we interact with ourselves and with our environment.

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Krishna states that the subject of karma yoga has never been understood by people in the world. He said this five thousand years ago and today it still holds true, because karma yoga is a subject which involves understanding human nature and developing awareness of the total personality. It is a process of observing our movement in life from gross to subtle to spiritual.

## **Becoming aware**

Karma yoga has five components. The first component is awareness. Becoming aware begins with the body when you practise asana. The awareness becomes part of the physical movement. If you move a finger, you are aware of the movement of the finger, and also the pull of the muscles and the movement of the joints. The emerging awareness dissects the finger into bones, muscles and nerves. The muscles and bones move differently, the nerves and ligaments pull differently. The awareness continues to become more acute, more subtle. What you observed before is one experience, which later deepens so that you become aware of other components. The aim of asana is to make you aware of your body and how it expresses itself in normal situations. Awareness in asana will lead to comfort and stability.

In the *Yoga Sutras*, Sage Patanjali defines asana as a posture in which one is comfortable and stable. You have been sitting for the last twenty minutes. Are you stable and comfortable? Some of you are, some are not, and those who are at present comfortable will become uncomfortable after ten minutes. At present we are not connected with the body. We sit, but we are not aware of sitting. We walk, but we are not aware of walking. We move our body, but we are not aware of the body's movement. The purpose of asana is to lead you to a state of comfort and stability. Recognition of comfort and stability will only come when you become aware.

## **Observing the reactions**

The second component of karma yoga is mental, observing your reactions and inner behaviour. Someone says, "You are very beautiful and a great and wonderful person." Someone else says, "You are hopeless." These sentences affect your sensitivity and create a reaction which dominates your preconceptions and beliefs. You either feel elated or depressed. The mood changes. A single sentence has the power to alter one's mood. So, in karma yoga first we become aware, and then we observe the reactions.

Sage Patanjali states in the third sutra, “The seer becomes established in his own nature.” Who is this seer or observer and what is its role? Initially, The first role of the seer is to experience how the person is responding and reacting to people, situations and events. This is one of the aims of meditation as well. Through meditation we experience and observe the changes in the moods, consciousness and mind. When we are aware of the manifesting mental expressions, we are able to direct and guide them. Meditation becomes a process of realizing the mental, psychological, subtle, emotional movement or karma.

### **Developing immunity**

The third component of karma yoga is developing immunity to situations that normally affect you deeply and internally. How? By coming out of the self-centred perceptions in which other people or objects do not exist and you are the centre and focus of your life. When you are able to move beyond a self-centred awareness, you begin to develop immunity to events and ideas that affected you before.

### **Managing emotional expression**

The fourth component of karma yoga is releasing emotional blockages. Emotions are slippery. Intellect is a linear path. Through logic you can go in a continuous route from point A to point B to point C to point D, right to the end. Logic or intellect is a straight, horizontal path, but the emotions are an inclined path, at least forty-five degrees, difficult to climb up, but easy to slide down. It is difficult to develop a positive, happy emotional identity, and it is very easy to fall or slide into the negative emotions. We have never been taught how to hate, to be angry, jealous or aggressive; it has come naturally. But we have to learn how to love, to be compassionate and positive, because it does not come naturally. Therefore, the emotions are a sloping path. We slide down most of the time, and moving up is a big struggle and a long journey.

Becoming aware of how you can manage your emotional expressions is part of the fourth component. Can you



maintain serenity in success or failure? If you can, you will have a very balanced personality. However, you need to have trust, faith and belief in yourself, and at the same time you need to believe or have faith and trust in some higher cosmic nature which guides your life.

The best example is a farmer. A farmer plants seeds and tends the plants in the hope that one day they will yield good results in the form of fruits and grains. But the farmer can do only so much. Beyond that he has to wait for divine grace and the right climate. There is a limit to human effort. If the environment is not right, all the farmer's efforts will be wasted, and if there is too much divine grace in the form of rain, it can also flood the crops. Up to a point you need to have belief, trust and faith in yourself and beyond that in the cosmic force. There has to be a proper balance between the trust you place in yourself and the trust you place in the cosmic force. This harmony of trust is known as karma yoga of the emotions.

### **Letting go of the obsessions**

The fifth component of karma yoga is letting go of the personal hang-ups and obsessions we create within ourselves. This is known as surrender. Think of surrender not in terms of philosophical or religious definitions, but as overcoming and releasing the obsessions and becoming free. The moment you are able to let go of your obsessions, you become creative. Obsessions do not allow the creative nature to emerge. Creativity does not only mean artistic expression. It means that the mind and emotions are in full bloom. This creativity is attained when we are able to release our obsessions and complexes. The next stage then becomes selfless action, which is spontaneous and natural. For something to become selfless, there is no desire, no attachment, no association with what is happening. Otherwise we try to convert water into wine the first chance we get, not because it helps us in any way, but because it boosts our ego. The selfish nature usually predominates. Becoming selfless is one of the hardest things in life.

Once God decided to grant a boon to a saint who had done a lot of penance. But once the saint had seen God, he desired nothing more in life and refused to accept anything. So God gave the boon of peace, prosperity and health to the saint's shadow. The saint did not know about the boon, but wherever he went there was peace, prosperity and health. That is a selfless act.

Selfless service, acting selflessly, is the culmination of karma yoga. If you relate karma yoga to the other yogas, you will see its relevance. Hatha yoga without karma yoga has no meaning. You also have to be aware that we are not talking about karma but about karma yoga. When the word yoga is added to karma, it means harmony in all the movements of life, harmony in all the expressions of the body, mind and emotions. This is the concept of karma yoga: internalizing the awareness, becoming aware and freeing oneself from obsessions and negativity.

Of course, we have to start with something tangible and recognizable, which is the body we carry with us from the time we are born until our death. So, in hatha yoga and in raja yoga, the association of karma yoga leads to deepened awareness. In relation to bhakti yoga, karma yoga leads to balancing of the emotions. In relation to intellect and jnana yoga, karma yoga leads to greater knowledge, perception, observation and wisdom. How does a perfect being walk, eat, live, sleep? Think about it. The answer lies in karma yoga and the process I have described. Even in kriya yoga and kundalini yoga, karma yoga has to be added. The experience that you have with the awakening of the subtle energies, the psychic centres, has to be harmonized by letting go of the negative tendencies and pulls of those centres.

How can we begin to understand and incorporate karma yoga in our lives? By changing our attitudes and perceptions through the practices and systems of yoga.

# Transforming the Attitudes and Perceptions

Yoga aims to improve the human personality from various perspectives. Apart from the physical practices, which free the energy and release tensions and toxins from the body, yoga also attempts to change the attitudes and perceptions. If we are not able to transform our attitudes, we will not be able to experience yoga, because to experience yoga we have to begin by making an inner change. This concept is encountered in the ashtanga yoga of Sage Patanjali, the eight limbs of yoga described in the *Yoga Sutras*: yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi.

## **Ashtanga yoga in today's society**

In ashtanga yoga, asana and pranayama are only two of eight components. The remaining six components involve attitudinal change. Yama and niyama represent a change in attitude or perception. Pratyahara and dharana represent discovery of the mind and transformation of the mental projections. Dhyana and samadhi represent deepening of awareness and realization of the total consciousness. Therefore, in ashtanga yoga the role of asana and pranayama is very limited.

When the system of yoga was being codified five thousand years ago, society was different, the mentality was different and people's needs were different. At that time the need was to improve the moral character, and so physical health was

given a back seat. Therefore, Sage Patanjali emphasized yama and niyama, which became the first two stages of yoga for people of that age. Today we need to change the sequence created by Sage Patanjali because our needs, perceptions and mentality are different. The experience of the majority of yoga teachers is that people identify more with the physical body and less with moral character. Asanas have taken a front seat, and today the world recognizes yoga in the form of asana and pranayama, not yama and niyama.

If Sage Patanjali had been alive today, he would have changed the sequence so that asana and pranayama become the first two stages of ashtanga yoga, followed by pratyahara and dharana, then yama and niyama, dhyana and samadhi. With asana and pranayama we learn to balance our physiological state, and with pratyahara and dharana we learn to bring the mind out of the negative conditionings and into the positive. Only when there is harmony of body and mind can the physical and psychological expressions become solid, positive and creative and the moral character developed. When a solid moral character develops, it becomes easy to move into meditative states.

The moral characteristics defined in the yamas and niyamas are the positive qualities that need to be inculcated in life. Most of you are familiar with the two yamas *satya*, truthfulness, and *ahimsa*, non-violence. These qualities are generated when the mind is at peace with itself. If the mind is not at peace, it is impossible to experience truthfulness. When the mind is disturbed, it becomes difficult to experience absence of violence from the deepest layers of the personality. In this age, therefore, yama and niyama become the fifth and sixth stages of ashtanga yoga, and asana and pranayama have taken first and second place. Today we are experimenting with asana and pranayama in the classroom and practising in the home. Now we need to work with our mind, not in the form of meditation, but in the form of pratyahara and dharana.

## **Mind and emotions**

Meditation will have no meaning if you are not able to direct your mind positively and creatively. People who have been practising meditation for the last thirty or forty years are still unable to control their emotional reactions, their anger and jealousy. Despite meditation, they are not able to direct the activities of the mind in the right direction. Is the fault in the meditation, or in our preparation and understanding of the mental processes? The fault lies in our understanding of the process that transforms and sublimates the mind. We are not masters of the mind; the mind is the master of our life. Therefore, we need to look at pratyahara and dharana in relation to bhakti, because although the mind and emotions are identified separately, they function in conjunction with each other. A thought carries a sentiment, an emotion and a feeling with it. A desire carries an emotion, a sentiment and a feeling. Logic carries with it a sentiment and a feeling. Logic and emotion are interrelated activities. In pratyahara and dharana, although we work with the mind, we also need to be aware of the emotional input.

## **Pratyahara in the Bhagavad Gita**

The clearest definition of the influence of the senses on the mind is given in the second chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Five thousand years ago, on the battlefield, Arjuna asked Sri Krishna, “What can I do to control and guide my disturbed mind?” Sri Krishna’s answer is a definition of pratyahara: “The mind is disturbed when it is unable to find satisfaction and fulfilment in its association with the sense objects and the world.” Therefore, in order to balance and tranquillize the mind, it is necessary to disconnect the mind from the senses and the material world. This disconnection is not rejection or renunciation of the connection, but having the wisdom to know when to connect and when to disconnect.

Sri Krishna further tells Arjuna, “Just as a turtle withdraws its limbs into its shell when it encounters danger, in the same way, when we encounter danger, we should be able to withdraw our senses into our shell.” The biggest dangers we face in life

are dissatisfaction and lack of fulfilment, because these states create a change in the human personality and perceptions. They create obsessions in the human mind, which restrict the vision of wisdom. When we lose our connection with wisdom, it is definitely the death of the human character.

Sri Krishna further defines how the external associations can induce altered negative states in the mind. Association with the sense objects leads to attachment. Attachment gives birth to expectations and when those expectations are not fulfilled, frustration arises, which restricts the clarity of mind. Frustration gives birth to obsessions and we forget what is right and wrong. The desire becomes the focus and the fulfilment of that desire is the drive. In this drive towards fulfilment we ignore the existence of others, we ignore our interactions with others, and this leads to confusion. Confusion leads to the death of logic, which leads to death of the personality. This is the sequence Sri Krishna has defined in the second chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Sri Krishna tells Arjuna that we have to become aware of our connections in the world of the senses, and recognize which connection has a negative influence on our nature and which connection has a positive influence. Then we have to learn how to manage the negative influences. This is also the theory of pratyahara.

### **Process of pratyahara**

*Pratyahara* has been translated as withdrawing the senses from the sense objects. That is the definition, not the process. The process begins with becoming aware of the activities and interactions that occur at different levels of the mind, recognizing their usefulness, deciding if they are conducive to growth, then incorporating them into one's life. But know that these influences exist within you. Pratyahara is managing our reactions. We are disturbed if there is a fight in the family, or if there is tension in the workplace and we are unable to attain our goal. There is tension because we are living in a competitive society. There is tension because we seek security at all levels, social, financial, familial, personal and spiritual,

and if we do not find it, we become disturbed. All these factors lead to mental disturbance.

Now, what do we renounce, from what do we disconnect and to what do we stay connected? We do not disconnect from our social needs, our financial needs or our personal needs. In yoga there is no rejection of the material world anywhere in this approach. There is an understanding of what is needed and what is not needed. We need to recognize our real needs, and disconnect from needs that do not lead to personal fulfilment and a feeling of security.

This process of understanding begins with thought observation. You are familiar with the practice of *antar mouna*, inner silence. In the technique of *antar mouna* there are seven stages. First, we simply become aware of the thought processes as and when they manifest in the mind. In subsequent stages we follow the thoughts back to their source. When we find the root cause of the thought, we become aware of the expectation in that thought, the feeling in that thought, the emotion in that thought, the security or insecurity in that thought. That way we are able to know the connection between the logical expression of the mind and the sentimental expression of the heart. Together logic and emotion weave a tapestry, that is the dress we wear.

Through the *pratyahara* techniques, we try to go to the source of our mental and sensorial manifestations. Just as *antar mouna* is observation of the thoughts, *antar darshan* is observation of the interaction of human emotion with logic. *Pratyahara* is simply a discovery of the human nature and mind, recognition of the extent of the mind and its functions.

### **Dharana – focusing the attention on a point**

When we are aware of the expressions of the mind, we move into *dharana*, concentration. *Dharana* means focusing, without any mental distraction. There is the story of Arjuna, the great warrior of the Mahabharata war. When he and his brothers were being taught archery, the guru decided to test them. He placed a clay bird on the branch of a tree, lined the students up and told them to shoot at the eye of the clay bird to prove

their excellence in archery. He asked each student, “What do you see?” The first said, “I see the tree, the leaves, the flowers and the bird.” The second student said, “I see my brothers, I see you, I see the river, the mountain, the tree, the leaves, the fruits, the flowers and the bird.” Each student gave a similar answer. Finally, he asked Arjuna, who replied, “I see nothing except the eye of the bird that I have to hit.”

The guru said, “Shoot!” Arjuna’s arrow went straight to the eye of the bird. That is dharana, focusing the attention on a point. It is not becoming blind to the other things that exist around you, but having that intensity and depth of concentration where you are focused on one point. This is the state of concentration we try to achieve in dharana, after perfecting pratyahara.

Pratyahara is recognizing the mental functions and mental states, and separating the necessary from the unnecessary stuff which floats around in the mind. Dharana represents a state of mind where there is no distraction and no dissipation. We do not need to practise meditation. We need to practise pratyahara and dharana. These are the two systems of yoga which give us the experience of harmony and peace. When the mind is in harmony and at peace with itself, the personality begins to open and become creative. In this process, you become a bhakta, one who is able to manage the emotions.

### **Satya and satsang – first stage of bhakti yoga**

The yamas represent the first stage of bhakti. Bhakti yoga has nine components or stages. The first stage is satsang. Satsang does not mean discussion, which is a loose understanding. Satsang means exactly the same as satya, the second of the yamas. *Satya* means ‘truthfulness’ and *satsang* means ‘in the company of truth’. Where do we find truth? Inside. When we are able to remove all the masks that we put on and to look at ourselves naturally, that is satya. Satya, the truthful nature, is an experience of a harmonious and balanced mind. In every situation ask yourself the question: is it the truth or not? Does this help me to progress, grow, develop and become more



creative, or not? Truth will always help you to grow. Untruth will make you fearful and more insecure.

Dissect your personality, dissect your desires, ambitions and expectations, and know what is the truth and what is unreal. Identify with the idea of the real you, not what you project yourself to be. Discover your strengths and weaknesses. The SWAN theory is very simple. SWAN is an acronym in which ‘S’ stands for Strength, ‘W’ for Weakness, ‘A’ for Ambition, and ‘N’ for Needs. Identify with the strength, recognize the weakness. Generally, we do the opposite. We identify with our weaknesses in which the focal points become “I can’t” and “I don’t”. Recognition of strength and connection with strength is important. Learning how to connect with the positive things in life is a very good habit.

Many people feel guilty because they become angry quickly and cannot control their aggression. Later they begin to feel guilty, thinking, “I should not have reacted in that way.” If you are one of those people, then think, “Anger is a natural expression of my personality. I can’t help it, but let me connect with the peace in myself. Each time I become aggressive and angry, when I become aware of it later on, I will connect with peace.” Do not connect with guilt; connect with peace. It will be difficult initially, but in time it will become a habit. Once it becomes a habit, it will start to change you internally. It is a change in attitude and perception that is important.

If you feel bad about a negative reaction or a weakness, then you will never be able to help yourself, but if you are able to connect with the opposite virtue, instead of with the vice, you will become better and better. This is the principle of the SWAN theory: connection with strengths, recognition of weaknesses, ambitions and needs. You will then be able to filter out the negativity from your life. That is the real practice of yoga, because it will lead you to manage the mind and emotions. It will help you to remove the masks that you put on day in and day out in different situations and circumstances, and it will enable you to identify with the source of truth inside.

## **Ahimsa and dharma**

Ahimsa is the second yama, having a non-violent nature. Ahimsa does not mean an act that you perform with your senses. It does not mean not harming another person physically, emotionally or intellectually. It simply means absence of negativity and violence from your personality. This was the lesson Sri Krishna gave to Arjuna at the time of the Mahabharata war. He said, “Fight, you are free to kill, but do not have the feeling of violence inside. Be free from the feeling of violence, it should not affect you. That is your duty as a warrior. As a warrior, fulfil your duties, but as a yogi, be free from the influence of the violence in your personality.” When violence is absent from the personality, there is connection with dharma.

Dharma does not mean religion. It does not mean obligation, duty or commitment. *Dharma* means the appropriate expression of human nature. There are three components to dharma: appropriate thinking, appropriate behaviour and appropriate action. When we are able to live dharmically, ahimsa becomes part of our nature. Violence is an outcome of inappropriate thinking, behaviour and action. So dharma and ahimsa go together. The method of connecting with dharma is explained in the second stage of bhakti. It is thinking positively, in a justified manner.

## **Connecting with reality – second stage of bhakti**

Think of the interaction between you, creation and God. Know that this connection exists between you and the higher self, but not only intellectually – feel it. What is the unified field theory from the yogic perspective? If a pin pricks your little toe, is the pain experienced in the head, the heart, the leg, the arm or in the little toe? Something is happening in the toe, but the actual experience is at some other level. Anything can happen in any part of the body and the experience will be at another level.

Similarly, the whole of creation is a body. Maybe our planet earth holds the same place as the little toe in our body. If you blow up this planet, it is like blowing up the little toe with

a small amount of dynamite. Who feels the pain? Who feels the death and destruction? The self feels it. In this body it is the self that feels the pain, and if you destroy this planet, the higher self will feel the pain. We are all part of this body. The unified field theory means the body of God. Whatever happens in any part of creation, in any part of the planet, will affect the consciousness of the higher self, just as a pinch to any part of the body will affect the self which is in this body.

The second stage of bhakti yoga involves identifying with the microcosmic field of the body and the microcosmic field of the universe, becoming responsible for the wellbeing of the microcosmic self as well as the macrocosmic self. In order to deepen this understanding, there has to be a philosophical understanding of life, not intellectually, but knowing that you are part of a higher consciousness. Philosophies and concepts, even religion if it is simple enough, will help you to understand the connection that exists between man and God. The culture of each society is rich enough to give this level of understanding and to deepen the awareness of the connection between man and God. We have to approach that level of understanding from our own perspective.

There is a song, "Take a look at yourself and you will see others differently." You do not have to look at others first. Begin by looking at yourself. This will lead you to dharma, and dharma will lead you to purification of the expressions and behaviour of the personality. So, remember that we need to change our perceptions and attitudes. Asana and pranayama are the physical components that lead to freeing the energy in the body, but liberation of mind begins with the practices of pratyahara, dharana and bhakti.

# Components of Bhakti Yoga

We have seen that the first component of bhakti is satsang, being in the company of truth or recognizing the truth that we experience inside. More than company, it is the recognition that there is a truthful nature within us, an identification with what is pure and innocent. This identification brings about an attitudinal change in a yogi's life. The second component of bhakti is identification with the reality that exists around us. We have not yet identified with anything that is separate from us, because we only identify with whatever has a personal meaning.

There is a connection with those things to which we are attached, and we do not see anything beyond our attachments. There is no empathy, no sympathy, no compassion, no feeling that can connect us to other existing realities which may not necessarily be our own. We can understand this concept in terms of the unified field theory. We need that expanded perception and awareness to know that there are other realities with which we are connected, maybe not directly, but indirectly. We are all part of the same environment.

## **Developing humility – third stage of bhakti yoga**

The third stage of bhakti is developing humility. Developing humility means keeping your ego in check. Ego is an expression that is spontaneous and overpowering in all our lives. The ego creates a very deep personal identity,

which responds to success and failure in the form of joy and dissatisfaction. These influences alter our moods and perceptions. When we are influenced by suffering, it is due to a negative identification with the ego, and when we identify with success, it leads to a bloated ego.

The best example is our own approach to success and failure. If we do something good, we say, “I was able to do it.” But if the outcome is different to what we expected, we say, “God willed it.” But if God wills the bad and you do the good, then you are saying that you are greater than God. Forget God! It is better not to think about God in any form if that is your belief. The ego is the centre of such expressions, moods and changes in our life.

To counteract the influence of the ego, bhakti yoga says to develop humility. A tree that stands upright in a storm usually snaps in two, while a tree that bends with the wind again stands straight when the storm passes. Humility is the ability to bend and again become upright and straight. It is the best form of ego expression that one can have, because it is as powerful as the ego in our life. Negative ego leads to frustration and elation, and is known as arrogance or deep self-identify. In many ways it means stubbornness. The positive form of ego is humility, the ability to bend, then again to find the strength to stand upright.

Humility is a quality that needs to be cultivated by recognizing the situations in which we interact. In yoga, attitudinal change is more important than performing a physical posture. There are two trends in yoga. One is personal, where you improve the quality of your nature and personality. In the other, after attaining personal harmony, you are able to express it.

### **Ashtanga yoga for personal development**

Sage Patanjali describes the process of ashtanga yoga as a way of personal development. You work on yourself with asana, with pranayama, and with the other six stages of yama, niyama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi. Ashtanga yoga is a process of deepening personal

understanding and perceptions. When you reach the state of samadhi, you experience union. This union may not necessarily be union with higher consciousness. Rather it is union of the different dimensions of human nature, where the head is in harmony with the heart and the heart is in harmony with the hands. That definition of samadhi holds together the positive qualities of life that we cherish. Samadhi is the ultimate experience of being a person full of vibrancy, optimism, dynamism and balance – what we call the awakened personality.

After that, when you have attained your self, your degree, your experience, what happens? Does that attainment only become part of your memory, or does it express itself outside in your behaviour and actions? If it remains part of a remote memory in our mind, then yoga has no meaning for us. Those memories can again lead to the downfall of human nature and again block the growth of the human being. This is known as *yoga bhrasta*, falling from the way of yoga or spiritual life. In one way or another, we have all fallen in yoga.

If you meditate, for example, and have a very good experience, if you see lights and angels in your meditation, then you want to relive that experience in subsequent meditations. The desire to attain that experience again blocks your further growth. If you are travelling from point A to point B in a car and come across beautiful scenery, you can admire it, but you cannot stop there. If you stop, your journey is finished. You will be stuck in the middle of nowhere admiring the beautiful scenery, but without any depth of identification. You will not be able to further your journey. That is the meaning of 'yoga bhrasta', having fallen in yoga, where one positive experience can become an obsession and divert the mind from its path.

So, even samadhi is not the final answer in yoga, because if you become obsessive about desiring the state of samadhi, you fall. But if you have attained the experience of total fusion and union, then it should become not just a good memory, but part of your natural expression in life.

## **The eightfold path of Swami Sivananda**

When you have completed Sage Patanjali's eight limbs of yoga, there is another eightfold path of yoga as defined by Swami Sivananda. Sage Patanjali speaks of personal effort to transform the quality of life, and Swami Sivananda speaks of expressing what you have attained and experienced positively, constructively and creatively.

The ashtanga yoga of Swami Sivananda begins with service. It is not the physical service of giving food or clothes or shelter. Service begins with connecting with other people, being able to put yourself in the shoes of another person, not becoming a reformer, but being able to experience the suffering of the sufferer. After you have experienced that suffering, use your wisdom and attainment to find a way to help that person. Then service begins. The expression of what you have gained or attained is externalized to help other people grow. As we begin to identify with others more and more, and as we begin to help others more and more, a very beautiful quality develops within, known as love.

Love is the second component of Sivananda yoga. Love is a most misunderstood word, yet it is the most desired thing in life. If you love somebody, what do you love? The body, attitude, behaviour, eyes, hair, laughter? It is not enough to say you love somebody very much. You have to identify what you love in that person. We have never been able to identify what we love, and therefore the quality of love tends to run amuck in all directions. Real love is not the fulfilment of one's personal expectations, not sensorial, intellectual or emotional self-gratification. Real love is the ability to understand, appreciate and be one with others, and to feel for them just as you feel for yourself. This quality comes after we have learned to express ourselves in the form of service. Unconditional love transcends all feelings, emotions, expectations and desires.

The third component of Swami Sivananda's yoga is giving. After you have learned to love, you don't hold back, you give. If you are connected to love, then there is no holding back. There is only giving and giving and giving without desiring anything in return. A tree does not eat its own fruit because

its nature is to give. When you pick the fruit, it may hurt the tree, but at the same time it is happy that somebody is enjoying its fruits.

The fourth component of Swami Sivananda's yoga is purify. Purification happens naturally and spontaneously when you have attained the ability to share the beauty you have experienced. Purification does not mean absence of negative qualities inside, but a feeling of satisfaction or wholeness that does not allow anything negative to influence you. You remain in a pure state of being all the time.

The fifth and sixth components of Sivananda yoga are be good and do good. When you are purified and free from the influences of the sensorial, material world, then all the good things come under your command. You become good. When you become good, you do good and when you do good, again you move into a natural meditative process. This meditation is not a personal effort, but a universal connection with everything. When there is a universal connection with everything, realization of oneness takes place.

The eight components of the ashtanga yoga of Sivananda are serve, love, give, purify, be good, do good, meditate, realize. This is the external expression of yoga in one's life. Personal practice is the yoga of Sage Patanjali, and expression of this nature is the yoga of Swami Sivananda. Both come together to form a complete picture. This is what we need to understand. Stop thinking of yoga as a practice and make yoga a way of life. In order to make yoga a part of your life, you have to understand the need to become humble. Humility is the third component of bhakti.

### **Mantra – fourth stage of bhakti yoga**

The fourth component of bhakti is the chanting of mantras. Mantras help us to connect with our psychic personality. There are different kinds of mantras. Religious mantras we understand in the form of prayers which help us to connect with the positive in life. When we say a prayer, we feel our sins have been pardoned. Prayer focuses the mind on something special, not on pain and suffering.



Yogic mantras are associated with the chakras in the psychic body. If you have seen images of the chakras, you will know that they are presented in the form of lotus flowers with different numbers of petals. The symbol of the lotus is used for the awakening of altered states of consciousness. In each petal there is a sound to activate a particular nadi. Each petal represents a nadi. Nadis are not nerves, but conductors of the vital force. These flows of vital energy awaken the dormant centres of the brain and mind. Even science recognizes that many aspects of the human brain are inactive. One-tenth of the human brain is active and nine-tenths is dormant. The nadis, the conductors of prana shakti, are connected with the dormant areas of the brain. At the time of awakening of these centres in the brain and at the level of the mind also, we experience an altered state of consciousness.

The nadis respond to vibrations. Each vibration carries with it a particular resonance and frequency. The mantra written on each petal corresponds to that particular frequency and vibration to activate the prana shakti. So the combinations of syllables in yogic mantras affect and alter the expression, manifestation and energy of these different psychic centres. Mantras are considered to be an important part of bhakti, management of human emotion. Bhakti is not deepening devotion but managing emotion.

The effect of mantra can be intensified or made subtle, depending how it is chanted. If you chant the mantra loudly, it will create a verbal frequency which will influence the nadis. If you repeat the same mantra mentally, it will create a subtle frequency. For example, if you sing the mantra Om Namah Shivaya as a kirtan, the sound will create a resonance in the environment, which will influence the physical moods. Maybe your body will begin to sway with the kirtan and you will begin to forget your inhibitions and get up and dance.

In the early days of the ashram in Munger, we used to sing one kirtan continuously throughout the night. Spontaneous awakenings used to take place. When the energy started to rise, people would start dancing and forget the world. Some

would move into a state of ecstasy, into *sahaja samadhi*, the simplest form of ecstasy, through kirtan. Kirtan can lead to spontaneous ecstasy. Mantra chanting can create a wave of energy which can transport you from one level of experience to another. The same result happens in a subtle form when we repeat the mantra mentally in our meditative practices. The perception, awareness and concentration are deepened. It becomes an anchor to hold the mind together when we move into deep states of meditation.

### **Om Namah Shivaya**

In the mantra ‘Om Namah Shivaya’, ‘Om’ is one mantra. According to kundalini yoga, Om relates to ajna chakra, the centre of command for the psychic body and psychic experiences. ‘Na’ ‘Ma’ ‘Shi’ ‘Va’ and ‘Ya’, are five different syllables dealing with different chakras. ‘Ya’ is the mantra of anahata. When you say ‘Yes’, what do you feel? I am using the word ‘yes’ because it begins with ‘ya’. ‘Yes’ is a feeling of fulfilment in the heart. If you ask a child if she wants chocolate, she will say, “Yes!” ‘Ya’ is the sound of joy and happiness related with anahata chakra. ‘Yam’ is the mantra of anahata chakra. ‘Va’ is the sound of swadhisthana chakra, representing the unconscious mind. ‘Shi’ is the sound of vishuddhi chakra in the throat. ‘Na’ and ‘Ma’ are the sounds of manipura chakra.

When we use the mantra ‘Om Namah Shivaya’, therefore, we are not saying that we are bowing down to Lord Shiva, which is how many people translate it because they have never really looked into the deeper aspects of kundalini yoga, and create a meaning for the mantra from the religious aspect. The mantra ‘Om Namah Shivaya’ relates to ajna, vishuddhi, anahata, manipura and swadhisthana chakras. In this way, all the major centres are somehow infused with prana shakti and become active.

Mantra is the fourth component of bhakti yoga in the form of kirtan or meditative practices to awaken the psychic body. There are five more stages of bhakti yoga. For now, we will deal with only four aspects, so that you can absorb it and

see how it relates to your life and your aspirations to progress on the spiritual path.

### **Union without boundaries**

Yoga is a process of personal management. The body is managed through hatha yoga. The mind interacting with the world of the senses is managed through raja yoga. The emotional self is managed through bhakti yoga. The psychic self is managed through kundalini yoga. The intellect is managed through jnana yoga. All these lead to the experience of *ananda*, bliss. Just as air has no boundaries, in the same way, ananda has no boundaries. It is the factor that unites each and every expression of human life. Awareness of that bliss as the unifying force of the various dimensions of the human personality is the ultimate realization. That is the message of yoga.

# Yoga Today

Yoga is a system, a philosophy, a way of life and a way of understanding, appreciating and accepting life. Yoga is a set of practices we can do to integrate the qualities of the body, mind and emotions, and to realize the qualities of the spirit. Yoga is a process of personal transformation which leads to the improvement of the family and social environment.

Although the system and tradition of yoga has only emerged in the West in the last fifty years, it has had far-reaching consequences. The greatest contribution has been the gift of realizing the connection that exists between the material and spiritual dimensions. The great seers of the past have maintained that in order to experience the wholeness and completeness of life, it is important to realize the connection between our material expressions and our spiritual aspirations.

## **Swami Sivananda's vision**

Swami Sivananda Saraswati was one of the greatest yoga masters of the twentieth century. When he was called to spiritual life by unseen powers, he adopted the path of yoga and vedanta. Vedanta is a philosophical system which aims to realize the divinity existing in one's life. Yoga became the means to realize this potential. As we know, until recently yoga was shrouded in mystery, and the word yoga would invoke an image of a person sitting high up in the mountains, isolated in a cave, deep in meditation.

Swami Sivananda believed that this interpretation was not correct. He believed that yoga had a definite influence on the body and mind, and with the tools available at that time, he started to investigate the effects of yoga on the body and mind. It was his vision to establish a university of yoga where the subject could be expanded. However, due to the mystical covering around yoga, his vision could not be realized in his lifetime.

Swami Sivananda never believed in reforming people, or in guiding a person to live in a specific way. He said that there has to be a natural inclination to change, which becomes the motivation. He never believed in forcing an individual to adopt a certain way of life or identity. He used to say the human habit is like the tail of a dog, always crooked. Even if you put the tail in a pipe for twenty years to try and straighten it, it will again curve when you remove the pipe. For this reason he said, “No preaching, no moral education. Let people connect with inspiration.” He did not advocate any form of indoctrination, but he inspired many of his disciples to perfect the process of yoga.

Swami Sivananda instigated a scientific understanding of yoga in relation to the human personality. Swami Satyananda never forgot Swami Sivananda’s vision. Silently, he kept working to establish yoga as an academic subject, as a scientific subject, as a subject relevant to human life. When he constructed Ganga Darshan in Munger, people said, “What is the need for this huge building? Ashrams are supposed to be natural, but Ganga Darshan is a very modern, up-to-date ashram.”

Paramahamsaji had in mind that one day Ganga Darshan would become a centre of higher yogic learning. If something is written in destiny, and if it is willed by God, it happens naturally and spontaneously. After creating Ganga Darshan, Paramahamsaji renounced his mission in 1988, so it is the third generation which is making this dream come true. Paramahamsaji did not tell me to establish a yoga university. He never discussed the future of Ganga Darshan, but as and when things happened, I realized that it was a continuation of the mission envisioned by Swami Sivananda, carried

forward by Swami Satyananda, and implemented by the third generation.

If we reflect upon the thinking which motivated Swami Sivananda and Swami Satyananda, it seems that only God's will could have guided such activities. Otherwise it would not have been possible to do so much work in so short a time. This is my belief because I have seen miracles happen when it comes to the mission, and what we know of yoga today. Definitely, in the history of human civilization, the name of Swami Sivananda and his disciples is held in high esteem.

### **Changing trends in yoga**

Forty years has been a very short time in the history of yoga. In fact, yoga has only really taken off in the West in the last ten years. Before that it was personal, for trimming the waistline for releasing stress, for learning how to relax, for deepening concentration. But the real integration of yoga in society only began to happen in the nineties.

From the beginning, Swami Satyananda envisioned that Bihar School of Yoga would impart yoga training in an academic, scientific, sequential form. So he named it 'school' of yoga, not 'ashram' of yoga. One of the major thrusts of the yoga teaching has been the application of yoga to manage various illnesses and disorders. As our environment becomes more polluted and our food more adulterated, the immune system becomes weakened. The body is not able to adjust and adapt to external changes. Physical weakness opens the doors to disease and ill health.

The management of health through the principles of yoga is the subject of continuing research and clinical investigations. Many medical professionals are utilizing the principles of yoga, because the medical system increasingly recognizes that present day medical therapy treats the symptoms but not the cause of the illness. Today yoga is making headway in a very positive and optimistic way. It is applied in the management of a wide range of disorders, from asthma to addiction, and to improve the development of human resources, in schools and industries.

## **Yoga education**

Yoga has always been part of the human effort to discover strength of character and personality. There is no cultural or religious conflict involved in the concepts of yoga. Yoga is now being accepted in countries which initially opposed yoga on theological grounds. For example, recently a yoga ashram community was approved by the clergy in Iran because it was realized that yoga is not anti-religion, but helps to improve the human personality. Ashrams are places where yoga education is imparted to everyone. Many yoga centres around the world teach only one aspect of yoga, whether it is the physical aspect or the mental aspect, because yoga is seen as a profession and as a means of earning a livelihood. But there are some places where yoga is taught in its true spirit. These places are recognized as ashrams or communities where like-minded people live together and experiment with the process of transformation. There is no rushing the process of yoga; rather natural evolution and growth are experienced. In the course of time, as more and more people are trained in the principles of yoga, such communities will further develop.

In order to teach yoga, it is necessary to have competent teachers. We are working at an international level to define the minimum qualification levels. We are creating guidelines for the teaching of yoga as therapy, for the teaching of general yoga and advanced yoga, so that we can look at the total scope of yoga and not just experiment in our own way.

## **Discovering our potential**

As we deepen our perception and awareness through the physical practices, we realize the consciousness that lies dormant in the cells and in the various subtle bodies. There are many possibilities hidden deep inside our physical body. Within the body, there are other experiences which are recognized as manifestations of energy of the inner mind and of the universal mind or consciousness. With this understanding, yoga becomes a process of discovering the potentials that lie hidden in the body, brain, emotions, mind and spirit.

Through the practices of yoga, an inner psychological transformation also takes place spontaneously and naturally. Yoga provides us with the opportunity to experience the feelings that exist in different parts of the body. It gives us a way of releasing the tension and stress that accumulates and to experience vitality, vibrancy and relaxation in different parts of the body. This understanding has led to yoga being recognized, not just as a philosophical or mystical tradition, but as a system that can help develop the human personality and lead to better conditions around the globe. As a result, yoga is being accepted by diverse cultures and is being applied for the harmonious development of the social environment.

If we learn to appreciate the good things that exist in the family of humanity, we will be able to connect with each other and grow together. It is a practical process of development. A blind person aspires to see the light of the sun. This desire is only an aspiration, not an immediate need. The immediate need is to be able to see, for only the eyes can see the sun. This principle also applies to yoga. First acquire the ability to see, then you will be able to see everything. We are caught in a vicious circle where our desires and ambitions play a major role in guiding the processes of life. Yoga teaches us to take a step back and re-assess our needs and it provides a means of fulfilling those needs. Yoga does not attempt to show you the sun, but to provide you with eyes to see the sun.



# Practical Applications of Yoga

Hotel Expo, Barcelona, May 14, 2001

In this millennium, yoga has moved from being a subject of spiritual enlightenment to a subject of how we can be more balanced socially and more at peace with ourselves and with others. Self-realization is a very abstract idea. What do we realize? Do we realize the spirit, God, or our own nature? Rather than talking of the higher things in life, it is human life that has to be realized. This realization has to begin with an understanding and awareness of our expressions. The traditional meaning of the word yoga is union, but in the modern context yoga means connection. It is an experience of connection between the senses and mind, the mind and consciousness, consciousness and the higher nature or spirit. Yoga covers the dimensions of body, mind and spirit. Awareness of human nature is understanding this connection between body, mind and spirit.

How does this yogic process begin in our life? Does it begin with the physical postures, which are known in every part of the world, or does it begin with meditation? These different approaches to yoga are an aspect of the wide range of practices available. However, there are three main streams which relate to human life: hatha yoga, raja yoga and bhakti yoga. Hatha yoga deals with physical balance and harmony, raja yoga with mental balance and harmony, and bhakti yoga with emotional balance and harmony. The body is represented by the senses. The mind is represented by desires and by

the intellect. The body, mind and emotions have to be harmonized.

What is the result of the balance and harmony we seek? Physically there is attainment of health, mentally there is attainment of tranquillity and spiritually there is increased awareness. Spirituality is different from religion. Religion is a process, whereas spirituality is an attainment. Yoga is also a process and spirituality is an attainment of that process. In yoga, spirituality means awakened consciousness and activated energy.

### **Yoga and physical health**

It goes without saying that we often experience ill health. Thirty years ago people thought of yoga as a system for attaining a beautiful body. Some thought that yoga was a process of meditation through which certain divine qualities and attributes could be experienced. But then we started to experiment with yoga, and as a result today we know that many so-called psychosomatic problems can be managed with the practices of yoga. Clinical research by medical professionals has shown that yoga can help in the management of asthma, diabetes and hypertension. Investigations into the effects of yoga on cancer and AIDS has yielded positive results in Australia, India, the USA and Europe.

In 1977, the Australian Cancer Research Foundation taught yoga to six patients who had undergone medical treatment without success. The practices included yoga nidra to reduce the level of stress; breathing techniques to increase the vitality in the body; the pawanmuktasana series of asanas to help circulate blood throughout the body, release tension and improve vitality; and finally meditation on the breath with mantra awareness. The results were very positive. The level of stress and anxiety was reduced. With the awakening of the vital force, the immune system responded and began to heal the body, leading to greater physical and mental strength. Meditation enabled the ability to connect with the source of strength inside.

Dr Dean Ornish from the USA found that people with coronary heart disease improved after undergoing a program of yoga practices, including asanas, pranayama, relaxation and meditation, and in some cases that heart bypass surgery could be avoided. These results indicate that physical health can be attained through the correct combination of yoga practices. Understanding yoga's therapeutic role has given us great hope that diseases can not only be reversed or cured, but that health can be promoted and steps taken to prevent the conditions which lead to illness.

Hypertension manifests due to stress or imbalances in our body, lifestyle and personality. We take tablets or tranquillizers to control it, but we are unable to manage the causes. When we suffer from asthma, we use bronchodilators so we can breathe more freely, but we are unable to strengthen the weakened muscles, or to improve the environment which is the catalyst for the respiratory problem. Therefore, the modern medical system is more like emergency therapy to manage a critical situation and provide temporary relief. However, yoga provides an understanding of how health can be promoted and disease prevented.

### **Yoga and the mind**

In 1977, a study was conducted at Condorcet College, Paris, into the effects of yoga practices on school children. Is it possible to improve children's power of retention when they study? Is it possible to reduce hyperactivity to enable children to study better? Is it possible to increase their IQ? During the study, the school psychologists and teachers found a marked improvement in the students' performance. Not only did their intellectual quotient improve, but also the emotional quotient and the social quotient. We think of the intellect as being the final achievement, but it is not so. Many people with a high IQ have a low social quotient, and because they are unable to manage their emotions properly, their EQ or emotional quotient is also very low. Yoga speaks of these three quotients in relation to children: IQ, EQ and SQ or spiritual quotient.

Apart from improved retention, the students showed an improvement in interactions with parents, friends and society. They became more disciplined internally. Discipline is not something that is imposed. Discipline represents a streamlined personality, where the energies and the mind are focused, one-pointed and concentrated.

In the traditional yogic literature, the classical text is Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*. The opening statement is, "Yoga is a form of internal discipline." When Sage Patanjali was asked, "What is the outcome of internal discipline?" he replied in the second statement, "Through discipline one is able to guide the expressions of the mind." When Sage Patanjali was then asked, "What happens when one is able to guide the mental expressions?" he replied in the third statement, "Then you realize your real nature." These three statements have become the foundation of yogic science.

This internal development was evident in the students who were exposed to yoga. Whether or not they discovered their true nature, we don't know, but we do know that they became better human beings. As a result of the study, the government of France established a system for training school teachers in yogic principles. The organization Research on Yoga in Education (R.Y.E) has become an important movement in France and other countries around the world, working to integrate yoga in the classroom.

### **Releasing tension through relaxation and awareness**

Medical research conducted in Australia, the USA and India indicates that the psychological problems which manifest in the body as disease can be alleviated by practising basic concentration techniques. There is a natural process of assimilation and rejection. The food we eat is assimilated in the body and the waste products are expelled. If the body is constipated, we will try to get rid of it as fast as possible, but do we do the same with our mind?

Our mind is constipated because we consume so much mentally, so many ideas, thoughts, desires and ambitions. All our memories, good and bad, positive and negative, stressful

and relaxed, become impressions in our mind. Psychologists and psychiatrists also tell us that what we hold in our mind becomes the cause of mental disturbance. If we are exposed to negativity, we retain that negativity. Scientists have also discovered that a negative thought has a detrimental effect on the body because it creates neurochemical changes.

Concentration, focusing the mind, is a method of removing the accumulated mental waste and improving the mental faculties. Therefore, meditation is emphasized, not for self-emancipation, but for discovering and removing the blocks in our nature. We need to learn how to relax and how to focus. Awareness and concentration lead to relaxation, which releases stress and tension, allowing us to become free from mental and emotional constipation.

Most people have never learned how to relax. Tranquilizers constitute seventy percent of the world's medications. If we need drugs to sleep, it indicates we have lost the ability to relax, and that is the greatest tragedy of humanity today. Yoga nidra is a process of deep relaxation in which the mind is fully active, yet relaxation is deep. Sleep is not relaxation. When we go to bed, we take our tensions and frustrations and fall asleep thinking about them. An unconscious psychological tension builds up and we sleep with that tension. Relaxation means being able to consciously release tensions from the body, mind and emotions. It is not something we need to learn. Rather it can become a natural part of our life.

Yoga first teaches us how to relax by consciously becoming aware of the areas where tensions lie in the mind, emotions and body. In yoga it is often said: become aware, remain alert. It is a natural process. When you drive a car, you are aware that you are driving the car. If that spontaneous awareness is lost, there will be an accident. Excessive awareness can also lead to accidents. The awareness has to be natural, not too little or too much.

The best example of balanced awareness is a mother. While she does her work, one part of her mind is always alert to her baby. Although she is not watching the baby constantly, she is aware when the baby is in trouble, and she will stop, remove

the baby from the area of danger and continue working. When your offspring go to another country, you remember them constantly because you are very attached to them, but it is not an obsessive remembrance. You have to develop the same awareness in relation to yourself. You do not have to chase a thought or an emotion and hang on to it, or become glued to knowledge of that feeling or desire. Just know that it exists and is creating a response in you. Be aware of that response, whether it is positive or negative, detrimental or uplifting.

### **Applying yoga in society**

Whether in the field of defence, industry, education, prisons, sport, or just creating a better social environment, yoga is being applied more and more every day. Investigations are being carried out into how yoga can improve the quality of life for those who suffer from psychosis, phobias, fears, anxieties, depression, even addictions. Other applications of yoga include improving the quality of the mind by integrating yoga into the academic environment of schools, colleges and universities. Yoga teaches how to manage real life situations rather than pursue abstract ideas. Developing the human personality is the main vision of yoga, because only when we become aware and harmonize our personality do we open the doors to wisdom.

Incorporating yoga into society is more important than personal enlightenment. Personal realization will not help anybody except oneself, but our efforts to bring yoga to other people will help many. It is heartening to know that people throughout the world have become more and more receptive to the science of yoga. A yoga centre has been established in Iran with the approval of the Islamic clergy. It is being understood that yoga is not a religion, but is beneficial for the development of the body and mind, and will assist people to better understand their own religion.

If this is the message yoga carries to every part of the world, then we can hope that one day we will be able to unite, not only spiritually, but also globally and socially. Only then

will we be able to say that yoga means union. Today yoga means connection, and there is a big difference between connection and union. In order to discover union, we have to go back to the roots.

### **Nourishing the spirit**

When we look at ourselves, we see our our life, our house and our family, our expectations and desires. When we look at a tree, we see the trunk, branches and leaves, but not the roots, which are underground and unseen. The roots support the tree and need to be nourished so that it is strong enough to withstand storms. Similarly, the root of our life is the spirit, which cannot be seen. Because we have been unable to nourish the inner spirit, we wear a label: 'I am fragile – handle with care. I get hurt easily, I am sensitive. Be gentle with me, be kind to me, don't hurt me.' However, if we look deep into the roots of our life and nourish the spirit, then the strongest wind cannot break us.

How do we look within? Not by closing our eyes and forgetting the world, which is escapism, but by going into life with our eyes and arms open. Yoga teaches us to escape into life, not away from life. By becoming aware, by relaxing, by focusing, by enhancing the qualities of the personality, you become a farmer, one who plants good seeds, nourishes and protects them and finally enjoys the fruits of their labour.

We have to connect with the positive, not with the negative. When we look at a rose, we admire the beauty of the flower and ignore the thorns. When we look at ourselves, we generally see the negativity, tension, stress and anxiety. But if we simply raise our vision a few inches higher, we will see a beautiful flower – the flower of positivity and conviction. This flower represents the human effort to transcend, transform and attain something beautiful and peaceful.

# Managing Stress with Yoga

Hotel Expo, Barcelona, May 16, 2001

Intelligence is unique to human beings, and we need to guide and nurture this faculty. We think of the intellect as a function of the brain, inputting information into our life. What goes into our mind and brain is known as knowledge. Knowledge comes through understanding and experience. It remains within us in the form of an impression. However, there comes a time when we are unable to apply that knowledge in our daily life, because it has simply remained within us without being actualized.

Wisdom is being able to actualize that knowledge. Applied knowledge is wisdom. The highest form of intellectual expression is wisdom, not bookish knowledge. In times of confusion, we are not able to discriminate between right and wrong, positive and negative, despite knowing what is good and bad. Intellectual conflict leads to stress and tension, and guides our thoughts and actions. Cerebral stress can be seen in those competing in the workplace to get ahead in their careers. A person may be intellectually very sharp, but the cerebral activity can create so much tension that ulcers develop. When we have this kind of block, where does our understanding or knowledge go?

If we look at the heart, at our emotional personality, we find a similar situation. Human beings cannot live without desires, but there comes a time when there is a block in the process of fulfilling our desires, expectations and emotions, because we are not able to clearly define the path to fulfilment.



People talk about falling in love, not rising in love, and this reflects confusion of the heart. Expectations related to our personal life create conflict in the heart, leading to emotional distress. Similarly, there is stress in our active life.

When stress accumulates and is not relieved, it becomes distress, which becomes the cause of physical and psychological ailments and problems. Cerebral stress stimulates the centre of the vital force in the body, manipura chakra, leading to abdominal and digestive problems. Emotional problems affect the respiratory system; for example, emotional suppression can lead to asthma. In the majority of cases, this is the trend. Stress is a must and should not be avoided. What should be avoided is the negative outcome, which is distress.

### **Avoiding distress**

To manage stress it is important to be yourself, to confront yourself naturally, to identify not with the situation or environment, but with the source of your being. If it is hot, rather than thinking the environment is hot, look at yourself and find out if you are hot. If you are hot, then try to cool yourself down. Human beings interact in two areas: the area of concern and the area of influence. We are not able to influence all the areas we are concerned about. For example, if an atomic test is being carried out in the country next door to you, it becomes an area of your concern, but it is not the area of your influence.

Generally, we get so caught up in the areas of concern that we forget those areas we can actually influence. This applies to everything in life, major and minor, big and small. We blame the environment and the circumstances, which are beyond our control. However, we never look at our own responses, which should be in the area of influence, where we can act. This recognition has to be generated through the process of yoga in which we become aware of ourselves.

When we become aware of our areas of influence, we will find that life becomes very smooth, because our area of perception is focused on one little area. There will be less

conflict and confusion, and we will gain the ability to manage our responses. Stress remains stress; it does not become distress. Stress becomes a motivating force, without being negative and restrictive. In today's society this recognition is the beginning of yogic awareness.

Yoga is a vast subject with different traditions, systems and practices. Just as in medical science there are different branches and forms of specialization, it is the same with yoga. Some people have become experts in the area of the body only, in the performance of physical postures. Others have become experts in the area of meditation only. In the world of yoga today, we find groups of people who teach what they know, and call it yoga. However, real yoga deals with the integrated development of the human personality. That is the Bihar Yoga or Satyananda Yoga tradition. We do not represent the physical or mental or spiritual dimensions only, but have an integrated approach which incorporates all aspects.

### **Yoga and 'dis-ease'**

What we call disease is actually the disturbed ease of the body – dis-ease. To experience wellbeing, the body must be at ease. How many times have you looked carefully at the state of your body and what it is feeling? We become aware of the body only when there is a problem like backache or high blood pressure. We treat any symptom that manifests with medicine, but we do not try to treat the cause of the problem. The cause can often be understood once we begin to internalize our attention and become aware of the tension we have accumulated over time.

In the 1960s Dr K.K. Datey carried out an experiment at K.E.M. Hospital in Bombay on the management of hypertension, utilizing shavasana, the pose of deep relaxation. Most of the patients had been under observation for two years while their drug therapy was being stabilized. Any attempts at reducing the drug dosage had led to an increase in blood pressure. After practising shavasana for one month, more than half the patients showed a significant reduction in drug dosage and blood pressure. In the other half,

those with evidence of hardening of the arteries showed no response, demonstrating the importance of early treatment. A significant proportion of the remainder had not practised shavasana properly and when they did, they also showed improvement. So the majority showed an improvement in symptoms and a sense of wellbeing, indicating that the use of relaxation techniques such as shavasana can stabilize high blood pressure and reduce or eliminate drug requirements.

### **Shavasana balances stress**

Shavasana is a very simple practice in which you lie down, become aware of the breath, the movement of the abdomen and relax each and every part, joint and muscle of the body. Nervous, emotional and muscular tensions are reduced. There are four types of stress: nervous, muscular, cerebral and emotional. Nervous stress is very subtle. We accumulate muscular stress while we are sitting, without realizing there is tension in the shoulders or back. Sometimes the postural condition creates stress. Become aware of it and let it go.

Cerebral stress is overworking of the brain. Four main types of brain waves are generated: beta, alpha, theta and delta, which represent the different frequencies of electrical activity inside the brain at the time of action, relaxation and concentration. Beta waves are related to our external activities. When we are driving a car, or riding a bike, or working in the office, beta waves are predominant. Alpha waves are related to a relaxed tension-free state. When we are sitting with nothing to worry about, sometimes alpha waves come. If we are focused, theta waves become predominant. This is the state of concentration. As we go deeper into states of focused awareness, another frequency is generated, known as delta waves, which are slower and more introverting.

Cerebral tension is experienced when beta waves become hyperactive and there is no relaxation of this activity. The brain becomes tired and we just want to relax. Sometimes there is sensitivity to sound, light and touch. Emotional stress, the fourth type of stress, occurs due to an underlying thought related to the family, to security or to fulfilment and satisfaction.

Dr Datey found that all four kinds of stress were balanced by practising shavasana. This example shows that many problems can be eliminated or avoided by simply deepening awareness of the body. For this reason yoga has been effective in managing many physiological and psychological disorders, because the practices allow the body to move into a state of ease from a state of 'dis-ease'.

Hatha yoga is commonly identified with the practices of asana and pranayama, but it has a deeper purpose than body awareness. Hatha yoga involves balancing, managing and directing the energies that control the body and guide the mind. When we look at our body, we do not see any form of energy except that which we experience in the form of muscular vitality or heat. According to yoga, however, there are five bodies existing together: *annamaya kosha*, the body of matter, *pranamaya kosha*, the body of energy, *manomaya kosha*, the mental body, *vijnanamaya kosha*, the body of higher intelligence, and *anandamaya kosha*, the spiritual body. Hatha yoga specifically aims at releasing blocked physical and mental energies, leading to absolute wellbeing of the body.

### **Develop good habits**

Providing ourselves with good, positive habits is another dimension of yoga. Our life is governed by habits, which can be as simple as smoking or as complicated as a belief or a way of looking at things. Habits have a material, gross aspect and a subtle, internal aspect. Habits are meant to satisfy the needs we feel are important for our fulfilment and happiness. Good habits can be developed by recognizing what we require in our lives. One good habit is knowing how to relax. Another is knowing how to release the accumulated stuff from the mind. Other good habits are becoming self-aware, then converting that self-awareness into a process of self-analysis, and then understanding through self-analysis the areas in which we need to improve our life.

One simple yoga practice can help to develop such awareness and habits. At night, before you go to sleep, for five minutes review your entire day from the time you woke

up to the time you went to bed. Recognize the situations, conditions and people that influenced you in some way, either positively or negatively. If something positive happened, be appreciative of that, but if you encountered problems and conflicts in some situations or interactions, ask yourself, "If I encounter the same situation again, how can I handle it differently?" Try to find a better way of dealing with it. Make an intelligent choice, because there are no simple solutions in life. It is up to us to choose the right ones.

### **Become a positive human being**

Through this daily process of self-reflection and self-analysis, you will find that your interactions, responses, perceptions and wisdom improve. You will become more connected with your positive self rather than with your restrictive, negative self. Yoga is not only a physical or a meditative practice; it is an effort to realize, to transform and to change. If you can do this for one month, you will become a yogi. A yogi is one who lives yoga every moment with awareness and clarity, with optimism and positivity, using the qualities that are present in all individual beings. Some people think that yoga ends with the awakening of kundalini. However, rather than awakening the kundalini, it is more useful to become a positive human being, with optimism and greater clarity and wisdom.

The purpose of yoga has always been to realize the nature of the body, mind and spirit, to connect with ourselves, with our environment and with humanity of which we are a part. Start this process by learning how to be serene and regular. Self-discipline and self-control leading to a developed personality is the purpose of yoga. Some people may think that is too difficult, but you will find freedom in discipline, and the moment you do, you will have fulfilled and lived yoga.

Let us make an effort to walk the path together, supporting, encouraging and guiding each other with sincerity, simplicity, affection and compassion. If we are able to take this first step, there will be no stopping us.

# Tantra and Meditation

Satyananda Ashram, Mangrove Mountain,  
Australia, March 22–24, 2002





# Tantra and Yoga

Our theme is tantra and meditation. We will begin our discussion with the history of yoga. Although yoga is an ancient science, the history of yoga in the modern age is only about fifty years old. In the twentieth century, our paramguru, Swami Sivananda, was instrumental in propagating yoga as a means of transforming the total personality. He did not consider yoga to be only a physical science, or a mental process, or a spiritual process. In the past, yoga was seen as a spiritual process, but somewhere down the line we isolated spirituality from our physical and mental experiences and created a division between the experiences of the body, mind and spirit. Today we say that the body is different from the mind and the spirit. But are they really separate?

## **Integral yoga**

Swami Sivananda said that yoga is the process of uplifting, transforming and harmonizing the entire human personality – body, mind and spirit. This idea created the foundation of integral yoga. Yoga emphasizes the experience of unity between body, mind and spirit. Yoga does not advocate or teach that humans are divine. Many philosophies say that a human being is essentially divine, which is a good idea, but are we able to understand or experience the concept of divinity in this life, in this environment? If you think about the idea of divinity, it immediately becomes associated with a religious concept.



The word psyche relates to the spirit, the experience of the spiritual nature. In this context we can understand that spiritual, mental and physical experiences are integrated with each other, and not different from each other. The psyche is the deeper realm of human consciousness. The manifest consciousness associating with the world and the environment is known as the mind, but the unmanifest consciousness is known as the spirit. In other words, we can say that the spirit, when identified with the world, is recognized as the mind, and the spirit, when identified as itself, is recognized as spirituality.

Sage Patanjali conveyed this concept in his third sutra: *Tada drashtuh swaroope'vasthanam*, where one becomes the *drashta*, the seer, the observer, and thereby realizes his or her own true nature. Realization of one's true nature is spiritual realization. But this realization has to happen by following a process of understanding and experiencing the gross nature and mind. The gross mind is a composition of different vrittis, which are physical, emotional, intellectual, and often internal or psychic.

Swami Sivananda was instrumental in clarifying the process of integral yoga. His teachings, as conveyed by his disciples, became the foundation for the development of integral yoga in the twentieth century. Many of Swami Sivananda's disciples investigated the yogic process in depth to find out how yoga was relevant to human life and the human personality, to see how yoga could fulfil the physical, mental and spiritual needs of people today. One of the pioneers in the yogic tradition was our guru, Swami Satyananda.

## **Two traditions of yoga**

There have been two traditions of yoga in the world, broadly categorized as the northern Indian tradition and the southern Indian tradition. The raja yoga of Sage Patanjali, the bhakti yoga of Narada, and the tantric kriya yoga propagated by Swami Sivananda and Swami Satyananda represent the northern yogic tradition. It is an integrated form in which

the body, mind, emotions and spirit are on the same footing. The hatha yoga and kriya yoga of Babaji belong to the southern yogic tradition. The southern tradition emphasized physical purity and psychic awakening through hatha yoga and kriya yoga. The emphasis was on perfection of the body and attaining balance by harmonizing the body. We see the southern tradition in the works of Krishnamacharya, Desikacharya and Iyengar.

The northern tradition emphasized raja yoga for mind management, bhakti yoga for emotional management and kundalini yoga and tantric kriya yoga for psychic awakening and spiritual unfoldment. Even though we have combined hatha yoga with raja yoga, bhakti yoga, karma yoga, kriya yoga and kundalini yoga, these two traditions represent the original thinking that guided spiritual aspirants to discover their inner nature.

Swami Satyananda translated the ancient concepts of yoga into modern language, adapting the yogic ideas and practices to suit the needs of people today. In the past, the greatest contributor to the science of yoga was Sage Patanjali. In the present age, we can describe Swami Satyananda as the Sage Patanjali of today's world. We may not understand this now, but history will be the witness to this change in our understanding of the yogic traditions.

### **Tantra – the root of yoga**

The root of yoga is tantra, not the tantra that we read about in the books available in the market today, or the tantra which people understand as sexuality and sensuality, but the tantra which deals with the realization and awakening of the dormant faculties in every being. The word *tantra* means expansion of consciousness and liberation of energy. Consciousness and energy are the two forces that have governed the lives of human beings from the stone age to the atomic age. Consciousness is known as *chetana* in broad terms or *chitta* in material terms. Energy has been identified with *prana*, vitality or life force. The awakening or expansion of consciousness and the liberation of energy has been the subject matter of tantra.

Whereas raja yoga has eight limbs: yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi, tantra has five limbs or aspects: vedachara, siddhantachara, yogachara, dakshinachara and vamachara. *Achara* means an attitude, a lifestyle, an expression, an idea and a practice. *Vedachara* is the path of wisdom, living according to the precepts of the eternal human values. *Siddhantachara* is the human effort to experience the transcendental beyond time, space and object; *siddhanta* means the perfect, desired end, the culmination or flowering of the human personality. *Yogachara* is the path of unity between body, mind and spirit. *Dakshinachara* is the path to control the dynamic or pranic dimension. *Vamachara* is the path to control the mind and its expressions.

### **Dakshinachara, the right-hand path**

The common idea of tantra is dakshinachara, the 'right-hand' path, and vamachara, the 'left-hand' path. The right-hand represents pingala nadi, prana, and the left-hand represents ida nadi, the mind. The right-hand path of tantra is awakening the solar, pranic energy, the *mahapruna*, not the isolated pranas located in different parts of the body such as prana, apana, samana, udana and vyana, but awakening and experiencing the energy which governs life in this physical, material world and its relationship with the cosmic energy which controls and guides the entire created universe. The right-hand path of tantra is the right hand of God.

The dynamism that we experience within us in this created universe, in our body, in the span of our life from birth to death, is an interplay of energy, vitality or prana shakti. The body moves because of prana; the senses function because of prana; the brain, cognition and awareness function because of prana. If prana or vitality is absent, there will be no cognition, no movement; we would be dead. So the right-hand path of tantra involves awakening and controlling the prana shakti. There are many different traditions, systems and techniques which guide us through the process of awakening the lower and the higher prana, and uniting this physical and mental energy with the cosmic energy.

## **Vamachara, the left-hand path**

*Vamachara*, the left-hand path of tantra, is awakening and controlling the subtle forces of the mind. Many people think that it is the path of sexuality or sensuality, but this is a false notion because the tantras advocate *sanyam*, restraint and discipline, not indulgence. Vamachara is the path of accepting life and the instincts as we experience them. But who experiences them? Is it the body, the spirit or the mind? It is the mind which experiences sensuality and passion, anxiety and fear. Therefore, mind management is the subject of the left-hand path of tantra.

There are different systems for confronting and managing the mind. Many of you will have heard and read that sensuality and sexuality form a part of human experience. However, in normal life people become obsessed by these experiences, whereas in tantric life one becomes a witness to these experiences, and obsession is not involved. The end purpose is to become the *drashta* or seer, the observer of the mental obsessions, the inner passions and desires, and managing them. Vamachara or left-hand tantra teaches one to confront the mind with all its inhibitions and complexes, all its *samskaras* and *karmas*. The purpose is cleansing the *samskaras*, the archetypes, and purifying the *karmas*, actions.

It is not a question of who can have the best sensual experience, or who can understand the relationship between the body and the objects that surround it. It is understanding how the objects that attract us influence our mind. The left-hand aspect of tantra is a very difficult and involved process because it emphasizes the need to develop not only the component of awareness, but also wisdom.

## **Yogachara, the path of yoga**

The third aspect of tantra is *yogachara*, the path of yoga, which Paramahamsaji decided was the appropriate path for today's environment. Why? If you look at other traditions, yoga is a subject involving physical and mental practice. In the southern tradition, *hatha yoga* is the process of physical purification and physical enlightenment. Just as we can

believe that spiritual enlightenment is possible, in the same way, tantra believes that physical enlightenment is possible when the spiritual experience percolates down into the body through the mind. If you burn your finger, the pain is felt by the finger, the brain, the mind and the emotions. In the same manner, if there is spiritual enlightenment, the physical body not only feels but also responds to that experience of peace, harmony and balance. If the body becomes enlightened and pure, the spirit also experiences it. Yogachara emphasizes this integration.

Paramahamsaji has always felt that vedachara, the path of wisdom, siddhantachara, the path of spiritual attainment, dakshinachara, the path of pranic awakening, and vamachara, the path of obsession management, are all integrated in yogachara, the path of yoga. He investigated how yogic principles are embedded in the tantric system, how yoga incorporated components of left-hand and right-hand tantra and the concepts of vedachara and siddhantachara. He came across a system which he refined and developed further to create Bihar Yoga. From the yogic tradition, he was able to perceive that the appropriate combination of yogic practices can lead to the development of the qualities of head, heart and hands.

For the head, or mind management, Paramahamsaji developed the techniques and concepts of raja yoga and jnana yoga. For the heart, he developed the practices of bhakti yoga. To awaken the qualities of the hands, performance, action, he emphasized karma yoga. For the awakening of the total human personality, the human psyche, he advocated kundalini and kriya yoga. These yogic techniques have now become the trademark or foundation stones of the system we know today as Bihar Yoga or Satyananda Yoga.

### **Raja yoga and jnana yoga for the head**

The head represents the mind, rationality, intellectual understanding. Raja yoga is the process of mental or inner self-discovery, from the most physical and gross level to the subtle and internal level, through the systems of pratyahara

and dharana, leading one to dhyana, meditation, and the deeper states of meditation known as samadhi. You can read about it in Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*. *Jnana* means wisdom or knowledge which is the outcome of an expanded awareness and developed perception, of knowing and realizing how we interact with life. Self-awareness leads to understanding and realizing the mind. Self-enquiry leads to understanding and realizing the interaction between life and the cosmos.

### **Bhakti yoga for the heart**

Bhakti yoga deals with the heart. *Bhakti* means redirecting the emotions, not devotion. Many people think that bhakti involves identification with a religious act or belief, or with an ideal concept of God. However, yoga does not advocate or talk about either an impersonal or a personal God. Different religions do, but yoga has no defined concepts of God. In Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, only three sutras (1:25–27) have defined God. They state that God is beyond the experience of time and space. If we say that God is beyond time and space, it implies that we cannot define it. If the experience of God is subject to time and space, it can be defined. An object, an experience, an understanding can be defined, but the experience of God is beyond time and space. This implies that the mind cannot grasp or comprehend the strength or energy of God, because it is indefinable. It is transcendental, omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent.

The sutras further state that if you believe in that nature of omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence, then know that you are also God. If you feel you are different to God, then you can safely deny the omnipresence, omnipotence and omniscience of God. If yoga follows this system of thought, then God is only the experience of transcendental awareness, which is beyond the perception of human intelligence and emotion.

Can you define life? Is life experienced in this body because the body moves? Is life experienced in the mind

because the mind functions? Is life experienced because the emotions attach and detach themselves? Just as you can see that life is not only the body, mind, emotions or feelings, but the coming together of all these factors, in the same way you cannot define God. Bhakti yoga is not the yoga of devotion, leading to adoration of an idea, faith in a concept or belief in an existence, but the purification and sensitizing of human awareness.

The yogic tradition says that bhakti yoga has nine stages. Whereas raja yoga has eight limbs, bhakti yoga has nine limbs. Raja yoga leads you from a correct attitude, yama, to samadhi. It is a mental experience, an attitude to harmony. Bhakti yoga leads you from discovering the truth within to becoming one with the truth at the end. The nine stages deal with the transformation of each level and dimension of human experience and existence. Bhakti yoga is a process of meditation, beginning with analysis of the emotional association with the world of objects, and transferring that emotional association from object to transcendental consciousness. In raja yoga there is the awakening of mental potential, and in bhakti yoga there is the flowering of emotional potential.

### **Karma yoga for the hands**

To enhance the qualities of the hands, Paramahamsaji developed karma yoga. In the third chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita* Sri Krishna tells Arjuna that karma yoga is the most difficult thing in the world to perform. He goes even further by adding, “Karma yoga has never been taught and cannot be taught. For the first time in history I am teaching you, Arjuna, how to practise karma yoga.”

What is the meaning of karma yoga? Everyone is subject to karma, cause and effect, action and reaction. It is the influence of karma that binds a person to this material plane, and does not allow sublimation of energies, sublimation of the mind, just as the earth’s gravity holds us down. If there were no gravity, we would fall off the earth or float away. Similarly, karma is the gravity of life. Karma holds the human

personality together by following a simple method of cause and effect philosophy. Karma is the cause of bondage and freedom, suffering and happiness. Karma is the cause of transcendence.

Karma yoga is a system that develops an awareness of the karmic theory of cause and effect. We perform karmas because we like to, not because we do not like to. The karmas we perform are physical and subject to our likes and dislikes. Karmas that are not subject to individual likes and dislikes happen spontaneously and naturally. They are the archetypes, the attractions or magnets that hold together the various facets of our personality and give us the realization that, “I am a human being.” They give us awareness of our individuality and an understanding of our nature and personality. They create the archetypes that can either uplift us or subjugate and control us.

Karma yoga is the most difficult of the yogas to perfect. It is easy to perfect hatha yoga because it is physical. Although the process is mental, it is easy to perfect raja yoga because we are dealing with something tangible – thoughts, ideas, concepts and attitudes. It is also easy to awaken the kundalini through kundalini yoga because it develops certain psychic experiences within the body. But karma yoga is the hardest technique to perfect because it has to do with evolving an understanding of the karmic process which connects our life to the cosmic experience, to the instincts, to positivity and negativity.

We have not perfected karma yoga. Those who have perfected karma yoga are *siddhas*, enlightened beings, those who can control and guide their karmas. Those who are still working with their mind and emotions are known as yogis. A yogi is somebody who is trying, not somebody who has perfected yoga. It is like the difference between a student and a graduate. When you graduate from university with a degree, you are no longer a student. A siddha has attained perfection or mastery, but a yogi is a student. Try becoming a yogi.



## **Moving beyond primary class**

Paramahamsaji always felt that the three components of human life – head, heart and hands – have to be integrated. The system he developed is an ongoing process. We have not yet discovered the full potential of yoga. We are only experimenting with asana, pranayama, pratyahara and dharana. We only believe that selfless service is karma yoga. We believe that repeating mantras or singing kirtans is bhakti yoga. We are still in the primary class of Satyananda University. We have not gone beyond that.

If we can understand the concepts of tantra and meditation in relation to yoga, we can move from primary to secondary class. We will come one step closer to realizing our true potential. Then we can see the benefits of this realization at all levels, from physical to psychological to emotional to spiritual. It is easy to say balance, harmony and integration, but to actually experience it is another matter. You may have taught and practised yoga for the last twenty or thirty years, but have you felt the peace, integrity, balance and harmony you have spoken about? Feeling it for one minute, two minutes, or a day is not good enough. It is like taking one sip from a glass full of water when you are thirsty. That has been the attainment. ‘Your cup runneth over,’ but you have not drunk from it. You have simply held it in your hands and brought it to your lips, but not yet taken anything in. Imagine yourself walking through the Great Australian Desert. Even if only one drop of water went into your parched mouth, you would feel immense joy and happiness. Definitely, it is now time to stop playing with yoga and to start practising it seriously.

# The Role of the Mind in Sadhana

Although Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* begin with the yamas and niyamas, these are not precepts to be followed or ideas to be developed, but the outcome of a particular state of mind. What is that particular state of mind?

## **The state of drashta**

In the beginning of the *Yoga Sutras*, Sage Patanjali has said that ultimately one has to become the *drashta*, one who is aware, who has developed the ability to observe, to be a witness without involved participation. If we take the drashta state to be the main aim and focus of yoga, then the yamas and niyamas become clear, and the process of meditation, samadhi and the development of the human personality also becomes clear. How? Sage Patanjali says that when the mind is at peace, without tremors or agitations, then it becomes possible to realize the true nature.

Sage Patanjali defines asana as a posture in which one is comfortable and stable. Is that comfort and stability only a physical state, or is it a mental state as well? If we include the component of drashta while practising asanas, we can experience the state of comfort and stability that Sage Patanjali has spoken about in the body and also in the mind. It is the generation and attainment of this quality that we have to aspire for in life, not perfection in asana or in meditation.

To understand the real process we need to know that the yamas and niyamas are an outcome of having attained drashta

awareness. Drashta awareness is guided by two principles: *viveka*, discrimination, and *vairagya*, the non-obsessive nature. Although *vairagya* is commonly defined as detachment or non-attachment, it actually means the non-obsessive nature, the ability to discriminate between right and wrong, good and bad, positive and negative, and, at the same time, keeping the mind free from its obsessive associations and attachments. These two components give birth to the state of drashta. The entire process of yoga is only this much, but the benefits are immense if only we are able to attain it.

### **Meditation – merging awareness with external activity**

Yoga has recognized that the mind is the portal between the manifest and unmanifest dimensions. On one side of the mind is the manifest world and on the other side is the unknown world. The mind associating with the manifest world is the lower mind. The mind which experiences the transcendental and the as yet unknown is the spiritual mind. As human beings, we function at the outer level and aspire to have an experience of the inner state. We try to go in without becoming the drashta of the outside. We try to become the drashta of what is happening inside, but we do not have control over what is happening outside. We have to revise our thinking. Meditation is not a process of internalization, but a process of recognizing the involvement of the lower mind with the environment. This state of meditation is the beginning of raja yoga.

Raja yoga has always emphasized that every activity can be made into a meditative process. Walking, talking, playing, enjoyment or aloofness can all become a process of meditation. Everything in life can become a meditation provided we are aware that the activity is taking place. This awareness is not only at a superficial level. Rather there is absolute merging of awareness with the activity. If awareness becomes one with the senses, if awareness becomes one with our thoughts, speech and interactions, that is meditation. So, it would be wrong to say that we have to withdraw ourselves from life to experience the deeper states of human nature.

In the *Bhagavad Gita* (2:54), Arjuna asks Sri Krishna, “Can you describe how an enlightened being lives, walks, eats, thinks and behaves?” Sri Krishna replies, “The state of enlightenment is known as *sthilaprajna*, stable wisdom. One who has attained this stable wisdom is enlightened.” This is a peculiar statement because we consider enlightenment to be union with the transcendental consciousness or God. We consider enlightenment to be knowing the unknown. But Sri Krishna says no. The state of enlightenment is having attained stable wisdom, and that is samadhi. *Sam* means balance, harmony or evenness, and *dhi* means intelligence. So the concept of samadhi is stable wisdom. The final result of yoga is not God-realization, not self-realization, but stable wisdom.

### **Focused awareness in yoga practice**

Our discussion concerns the role of the mind in sadhana and in the yogic practices that we do, especially in the system developed by our guru, Swami Satyananda. He has always said very clearly that while you are practising an asana, focus on a chakra, repeat a mantra, observe the breath, experience the stretch, the expansion and contraction of the body. So, the four components of the physical practices are awareness of the physical stretching while performing the posture, awareness of the breath, concentration on a chakra and repeating the mantra of the asana.

When you simply perform an asana without awareness of breath, mantra or the centre of concentration, then it becomes a physical practice, a yoga exercise. When you combine breath, mantra and chakra awareness, then the exercise can become an asana. Asana leads to physical and mental coordination, to the development of the connection between body and mind, not separation of the mind from the body. If you are aware of the breath, the point of concentration and the relevant mantra, then even push-ups can become an asana. This is the teaching of *yogasana*, which in broad terms is to internalize yourself, to focus on the experience that you are having. This focusing, this awareness, is the

drashta. Awareness will lead to discrimination, viveka, and the non-obsessive nature, vairagya.

### **Become the drashta**

Yoga says we can develop this type of mind, in which we can become free from many of the self-created problems and tensions which influence us due to our involvement. We become free from states of mental anguish, suffering and pain. The final experience of peace and stability combined with awareness, discrimination and non-obsessiveness is known as *swadhyaya*.

Many people have written about the yamas and niyamas and made them into philosophical concepts. We superimpose our own beliefs, and the more we try to justify our ideas, the further away we move from the original concept, which is lost in the maze of ideas which then becomes a philosophy. It has happened with Buddha, with Christ, with Mohammed, and it has happened with us. We don't have to look at these great people, we can look at our own selves. We need to filter out all these ideas and go back to basics, where we will find the real teaching.

The yamas and niyamas represent a condition of mind which is the outcome of having attained the drashta state. Therefore, we say that it is not necessary to practise yama and niyama. Start with asana, practise pranayama, go through the processes of pratyahara and dharana. Become the drashta by following these four techniques or systems. The moment you become the drashta, meditation will happen, the yamas and niyamas will happen, samadhi will happen.

### **Transform the negative ego**

The system of thought that has defined the mind best is the Samkhya tradition. Samkhya recognizes thirty-six conditions of mind, including the sensory perceptions, the tanmatras, the ego and the various expressions of the gross mind. In the Samkhya system, all these states of human expression, which are governed by the mind, are brought into focus. Meditation or dhyana is a broad term.

Whenever we are silent or whenever we close our eyes, we think we are practising meditation. But we cannot and do not practise meditation. We can only practise focusing the awareness from one experience into another. As long as we are subject to the lower mind, on one side of the mental portal, meditation is only identification and recognition of what is happening around us, and also realization of how we can detach ourselves from the negative influences of these associations, and transform our negativity into a positive quality.

By nature, human beings are not good people because our basic instincts are tamasic. The natural and spontaneous expressions are also tamasic. They are expressions of the ego, and ego expressions are always negative: anger, jealousy, hatred, envy, greed, etc. We have not been taught how to feel anger, how to express jealousy, envy or greed. These have come naturally, they are part of our life. We try to come out of this conditioned state by saying, “How can I learn to love? How can I understand love? How can I expand my horizons of compassion and love?” The enquiries we make, the questions we ask ourselves such as, “How can I become better? How can I develop love, compassion and purity in my life?” and all the moral teachings are only to balance the negative dimension of human nature. In the absence of these teachings we would all be very tamasic. We would not create heaven on earth, but we would live in hell.

The yogic traditions say that these negative expressions are vrittis. Not the vrittis defined in the *Yoga Sutras*, which are broad categories, but our ego expressions, which are restrictive, binding, negative and tamasic. That is the nature of the ego. It is very hard to find a positive ego. In fact, we can say there is no positive ego. Ego is always negative. According to Samkhya, *ahamkara* or ego has taken birth from the tamasic quality, whereas the drive to become better, the motivation and will to achieve something in life has taken birth from the sattwic nature. One is a state in which we live, and the other is something we try to attain. We live in tamas and we try to attain sattwa. This movement from tamas to sattwa,

by developing drashta awareness, by observing ourselves, is known as yoga.

### **Aspire for balance**

When you do anything in life, remember to always add your awareness to your karma. *Chetana*, awareness, and *karma*, action, performance, behaviour, attitude, have to come together. Swadhyaya is an outcome of a very special nature, the harmonious mind, and that balance is what we need to aspire for and move towards. In every activity, physical, mental or emotional, in every environment, social, cultural, or religious, in every situation, whether in the family or living singly, we can experience the true spirit behind our existence. We may not realize God, because that is a different reality altogether. Just as we cannot experience our body when we are asleep, or experience the state of sleep when we are awake, similarly, as long as we are in this body with this mind, we cannot experience the transcendental nature. But we can begin to improve the quality of our life, and that will be our greatest attainment. If, by improving the quality of life, we can learn to manage our ego, then we come to understand that 'I and my father are one' and there is no need to search for God.

# The Awakening of Consciousness

In yoga, personal experience leads to the eradication of avidya. *Vidya* is realized knowledge. *Avidya* is unawareness of the true reality. We have the knowledge, but we are not applying it. We know so much intellectually, but we have not applied the knowledge correctly in our life. The knowledge has to become part of our nature, and not remain only an intellectual process. The *Ishavasya Upanishad* states that ignorance leads one to darkness, but knowledge can lead one deeper into darkness. If you think about it, you will realize it is true. We are misguided due to avidya. We have knowledge, but our understanding is confined, and we do not know how to utilize the knowledge.

## **Desire**

In yoga there is a concept that knowledge is guided by our desires. Desires have two forms: one is *iccha*, which is plain simple desire, and the other is *vasana*, which is latent, hidden, unrecognized or instinctive desire. As human beings we are subject to these desires, which make us self-centred and self-oriented, and at the same time can make us open up and think of others. Desire can make us material or spiritual; the force is the same. Desire is a quality. God has made us in his image. The original desire was, “I am alone, I am one, let me be many.” So the root of desire lies in God. It is a genetic imprint. Just as we carry our body, which is given to us by our parents, similarly, we carry our desires, which are given



by God. When influenced by the negative quality of *tamas*, this desire becomes material. When influenced by the positive quality of *sattwa*, the same desire becomes spiritual.

### **Purusha and prakriti**

In the Samkhya system there are two forces known as *purusha* and *prakriti* (or Shiva and Shakti in tantra). *Purusha* represents consciousness and *prakriti* represents energy. In Sanskrit, *Purusha* is defined as *Puri shele iti purushah*, the consciousness that is dormant within you. *Prakriti* is the energy or force responsible for an action, from *kriti*, meaning ‘to act’, and *pra*, a prefix denoting intensity of action. According to Samkhya, these are the two realities that exist at the cosmic, universal level, and also at the personal level in the manifest dimension.

Tantra says that creation is the outcome of the union between Shiva and Shakti. Samkhya says creation is the outcome of *purusha* guiding *prakriti* to perform action. *Purusha* and *prakriti* come together at some point and *prakriti* does the work. With the union of these two opposing poles, a birth takes place, which is known as *buddhi*, intelligence. There are different levels of intelligence in *buddhi*. This intelligence is dormant in minerals, instinctive in animals and rational in human beings. Beyond is another level, the transcendental, the divine. In dormant intelligence, God sleeps in the form of stones. At the instinctive level, God lives in the form of animals. At the human rational level, God interacts as a human being. The divine, transcendental *buddhi* is when God becomes one with its own nature, which is known as a cosmic *lila*, a divine play.

We all take birth. We think we are important and unique. No doubt we are, but that is our self-perception. After seventy or eighty years, what happens to us? In the span of eternity, how much time does our life of eighty years represent? Our existence is not even the blink of an eye. But in another time frame, even infinity has a beginning and an end. That time frame is known by yogis as the day and night of Brahma. For us, a day of Brahma spans many,

many yugas. A night of Brahma also spans many, many yugas. And even Brahma dies.

There is a story in the Puranas, the Indian epics, of a very powerful king, so powerful that he went to heaven. He wanted to rule heaven, and he drank *amrit*, nectar, to become immortal. One day he saw many ants walking in heaven, and he asked God, “Why are there ants in heaven? Aren’t they lower life forms which should be on earth?” God said, “These ants are different. They are not the same ants that you find on your planet. Each ant is a Brahma, the creator, who lived and died, and who has now gone beyond that life and come in this form.”

Whether this story is a reality or not does not matter. It conveys the idea that nothing in life is permanent; everything changes, including time, eternity and God. The only thing that does not change is when everything dissolves back into prakriti; shiva and shakti separate; purusha and prakriti separate. Then they achieve their final identity and go back into the void, *shoonya*. During the day, you can perceive the world, colours and objects because there is light. At night, when there is no light, you cannot perceive objects or colours, and everything merges into nothingness.

### **Sequence of creation**

The ultimate nothingness is the state of purusha and prakriti. The firstborn of their union is *buddhi*, the supreme intelligence, and from *buddhi* come the gunas: *tamas*, *rajas* and *sattwa*. *Sattwa* is the state of light, illumination, enlightenment, known as *prakasha*. *Rajas* is the state of activity, *kriya*. *Tamas* is the state of inertia, *sthiti*. This is not inertia as we normally understand it. If you put water in a pool and leave it lying there, the water becomes inert, but it is only inert superficially because many things are happening. The function of the water continues, transformation continues within the water. Bacteria, moss, insects and many other things take birth. The water is no longer crystal clear, it becomes murky. Many life forms grow, which eventually absorb the water and the water disappears. That

is tamas. In tamas the energy feeds on itself and dissipates. Consciousness feeds on itself and is destroyed.

It is from tamas that we have come forth. From tamas, the cosmic creation takes place: the *tanmatras* or subtle essences of the elements, the *tattwas*, the essential elements, and the *bhootas*, the unmanifest elements. From tamas, personal and individual creation also takes place. The first to come forth is *ahamkara*, ego. For this reason, ego is always tamasic. There cannot be a sattwic ego, because once the ego becomes sattwic it does not exist anymore; it becomes one with light, and has no separate identity.

From *ahamkara*, ego, comes the lower mind: *manas*, *buddhi* and *chitta*. *Manas*, *buddhi*, *chitta* and *ahamkara* are then responsible for the *jnanendriyas*, the organs of perception, and the *karmendriyas*, the organs of action. In our physical body, the organs of perception are vision, smell, touch, taste and sound. At a deeper level, the mind is the *jnanendriya* for the spirit because the spirit interacts through the mind. So the entire human personality is actually a *jnanendriya*.

This is the sequence that Samkhya has said is responsible for creation. Tantra adheres to this philosophy. Vedanta accepts it in part. Yoga has accepted the Samkhya system because it is the most appropriate and easily understandable to define how a subtle transformation can take place by performing a physical action.

### **Five dimensions of experience**

Our body is not only matter but a combination of five different experiences: *annamaya*, matter, *pranamaya*, energy, *manomaya*, gross mind, *vijñanamaya*, subtle mind, and *anandamaya*, spiritual or inner bliss. These are the five dimensions of human experience. In normal life our identification is with the dimensions of *annamaya*, *manomaya* and *pranamaya*. In yogic life the identification shifts, enlarges and covers all dimensions. You are aware of the *annamaya* dimension along with *anandamaya*. This is known as the expansion of consciousness. Until now we have identified with our bodies, with our natures and with our desires, and we have tried to

achieve what we have desired, physical, mental and pranic. Yoga says to go one step further. Experience the vijñanamaya dimension. Awaken that consciousness, the potential lying dormant within.

Once that potential is awakened, the outcome is bliss, anandamaya. If you win the lottery or receive your degree, the first response is happiness or extreme joy, *ananda*. Ananda always comes after attainment, not before. Before it is pleasure, striving to find fulfilment. In this process, we have to face frustrations, tensions and depressions, every kind of physical, psychological and emotional problem, but after attainment we realize the ananda state.

So the expansion or movement of our perception from physical, mental, and pranic levels also has to be developed. When we begin to experience the awakening of consciousness and the experience of bliss through self-effort, by using our desires as a force for upliftment, we can begin to understand the vastness of life and how life is part of that eternal, ongoing process known as the cosmic lila.

# Satsang 1

**The first question is from the kids. Why did you take up yoga?**

I did not take up yoga, it was thrust upon me. I came to the ashram because of a feeling for Paramahamsaji. I wanted to be with him, it is as simple as that. When I went to the ashram, yoga was not in my mind. The only desire was to be near Paramahamsaji, learn from him, serve him and do whatever he told me to do. In this process, in a yogic environment, life automatically became yogic. I was never taught yoga formally. I picked up yoga only through observation and being with Paramahamsaji, and listening to what he said and taught.

We need an idol, a symbol we can emulate, somebody who is the hero in our life, and an ideal we can aim for and pursue. In society we try to emulate people who are successful, who have become something, or people who display a new hairstyle or fashion. Our whole life is spent emulating other people because we cannot be ourselves. People who can be themselves do not need to follow or emulate anybody. However, very few people in the world can be themselves, or remain isolated, centred and focused, without being disturbed and distracted by external influences.

Paramahamsaji has said many times, “In my life, my hero is my guru, Swami Sivananda. Externally, people saw him as a teacher, as a saint, but for me he was my hero, my ideal and my idol, all three together.” When the ideal, idol and symbol

become one, then the process of learning begins. When I came to the ashram, I was only about four or five years old, and at that age one doesn't think about practising yoga, about practising meditation, about attaining samadhi, or about how to manage childhood stress. The focus is different at a young age. Children try to emulate those people who are their idols and heroes.

I consider myself lucky to have found a hero, an idol for my life. Later, when I understood the principles of ideals, I discovered that my ideals and my idol were the same. The ideals with which I identified were those I saw in Paramahamsaji. So I can definitely say that I did not come to the ashram for yoga. I came to live like Paramahamsaji lived, to think like he thought, to act like he acted, to believe in what he believed in and to dream what he dreamed. That is the story of my life.

**Please talk about the best sankalpa to have for spiritual meeting with the self, and the best one for an anxious, frustrated person. Signed: Hari Om and love to you.**

You have already written your sankalpa – 'love to you'. Extend that 'you' into every being, so everyone becomes 'you'. That is the ideal sankalpa. It is said that sankalpa is a positive affirmation or thought, but more than that, it is a process of training the mind to develop the will and clarity of thought. Through sankalpa, we learn how to train the mind so that the will becomes alive. We need to develop willpower because we are undisciplined inside.

Many times during our lifetime, we think about what we should and should not do, and we feel frustrated when we are unable to extract ourselves from the situation that has dominated our mental behaviour. For example, it is possible to wake up at four o'clock in the morning maybe once or twice or maybe for a week or a month, but not be able to continue that for an entire lifetime. We can do it for a week because the motivation is there, but when our initial drive goes, we are left feeling lethargic. But if we have a sankalpa to maintain the motivation, lethargy will not set in.

However, the sankalpa has to develop the willpower. Positive affirmation alone will not do anything. We all think we should become this or that, or get rid of this habit or that habit, this nature or that nature, this obsession or that obsession. We can understand that rationally, but when it comes to actually applying it, we cannot due to lack of motivation. Sankalpa fulfils this vacuum. It is not necessary to have a very big sankalpa. Start with something small.

When I was young, I used to sleep very deeply. As I grew older, it became a problem, because I could never be on time for breakfast or for morning class. Then I decided to wake up at four every morning. I did that on the first day. On the second day it was five, on the third day six, and on the fourth seven am. This pattern repeated itself. I wondered what to do. So I tried to discover my natural pattern. If I went to sleep at nine o'clock, what time would I wake up normally without any mental clock or alarm clock? It was around six am, after nine hours of sleep. Then I started to set the alarm for five to six for one week, for ten to six for the next week, quarter to six for the third week, and twenty to six for the fourth week. In this way, I reduced five minutes every week, and my mind became used to that training until I reached four o'clock, until it became a habit. This is the training of sankalpa.

Sankalpa is not only thinking that you will become that, but also striving to become that. There has to be a positive sankalpa in everyone's life to uplift their spirits and minds. The best sankalpa is to feel love and to see oneself in other people. That is the sankalpa Paramahamsaji has indicated to us in the lifestyle he is now leading. He has said that if we could all see ourselves in others, if we could all share the beauty of that type of love with others, then the world would become a brighter place. That should be the final sankalpa of our life.

Before coming to this state, begin with something very basic, with changing the habits or limitations that inhibit your growth. Try to understand yourself, observe yourself, find where the blocks are, and overcome them one at a time.

Don't have an abstract idea or an unattainable concept without prior training. Children want to grow up quickly. They want to complete school quickly and graduate as soon as possible. But that is not important. The important thing is performing well in your class, not worrying about when you will grow up and get your degree or diploma. If you can perform well in your current class, you will pass and move on to the next class. You will also pass there and move on to the next level.

So focus on the present. Ignore the insecurities of the future. If something is going to happen in the future, why worry now? Perfect your present. The problem is that we are so tense that our past is tense, our present is tense and our future is tense. The present has to be perfect, and that is the teaching of yoga.

### **How can I be sure that yoga is the right path for me?**

You cannot be sure. How did you know that your husband or wife was right for you when you got together? You connected with a feeling which guided you. Before connecting with the feeling, if you had thought about whether your friend was the right person to become your life partner, that question would have haunted you always and your relationship would never have been successful. But when you connected with the feeling, it was the feeling that guided you. How can anybody be sure what is right or wrong. If we had that much knowledge and understanding, we would be problem free, we would be balanced. So, you have to follow your gut feeling and take a dive. If you think about whether you will be eaten by sharks or stung by jellyfish, you will never go in the water. So follow your feeling and let it guide you.

### **Swamiji, are you enlightened?**

Enlightenment is not something that I aspire for in life. I can inspire other people to come to a path where they can be enlightened, but it is not something that I desire myself. We know the theoretical and philosophical form of enlightenment, but we have not yet understood enlightenment in its practical form. That is the sadhana of every spiritual aspirant.



Enlightenment is not a mental state. It is a state of personality where every thought is pious, just and appropriate, every action nourishes and sustains life, and every attitude gives birth to a new dimension of experience.

When I look at how Paramahamsaji lives, thinks and acts, I can see that he is enlightened. He has attained that state of innocence, simplicity, compassion, feeling, sympathy, practicality, dynamism, clarity, and all the good things that go with enlightenment. We have never seen a negative reaction, a negative expression or a negative thought emanating from him. Even in the most difficult situations, he has always found the positive aspect. We are very far from such experiences. We react, we think bad and good thoughts. Sometimes the thoughts are tamasic, sometimes rajasic, sometimes sattwic. Sometimes pain and pleasures affect us. Therefore, enlightenment is not a subject for discussion.

From a philosophical or ideological perspective, one can talk about it, desire it, but from a practical perspective, it is like the moon hanging in the sky, which we cannot reach from earth. We can see it, but we cannot go near it until we leave the gravity of planet earth and become free from its gravity. Therefore, enlightenment means to become light, and not be burdened. That is the lightness and freedom of the human personality.

**Could you please explain what the villagers in Rikhia were like before Paramahamsaji came, and the changes that have occurred since he adopted them? Could you also speak on the future plans of Sivananda Math in Rikhia and around the world?**

There are only present day plans for Sivananda Math, not future plans. Sivananda Math is working in two regions of India. One is Rikhia, where Paramahamsaji is residing, and the other is the Bhuj area in Gujarat, western India, which was affected by a devastating earthquake in January 2001. You are aware of the work in Rikhia because you have been there and participated in the activities. However, people are not aware of the work that is happening in Gujarat.

On 26th January 2001, there was a massive earthquake which displaced thousands of people, caused widespread homelessness, created many orphans and shattered many dreams. Paramahamsaji instructed us to go and work in the area on behalf of Sivananda Math. We investigated what we could do, and took up two projects according to the needs.

One project is the creation of an orphanage for children who have lost their parents. We will become their family, and provide them with the opportunity to stand on their own two feet. We will provide them with education and vocational training, and enable them to become part of society. It is not our intention to take them into the yogic fold and make them into yoga teachers or sannyasins. We have to help those who are desperate to find their own footing in life, and give them the resources to live independently in society. This orphanage will house approximately four hundred children eventually. It is a ten to fifteen year project by which time the children will have reached maturity and have acquired the ability to make their own decisions and become part of mainstream society.

The second project in Bhuj is the development of Sivananda Vihar, a residential colony of about forty acres, to house those who have children, but have lost their husband or wife. We will also find employment for them so they can look after their families in a simple way. Many Australians have contributed to these projects. But we want to complete them before publicizing them. Then you will feel proud of the contribution of the yoga community throughout the world. We believe in working silently and avoiding crowds. People have asked if they can go to Bhuj to help, but we tell them that their skills are better utilized elsewhere. Let people rebuild their lives first. Don't go to see their suffering. Go to see the joy you have brought into their lives. Therefore, we have not publicized this project.

When you go to Rikhia during Sita Kalyanam, you have two purposes: to be in the presence of Paramahamsaji and imbibe his teachings, his energy and his wisdom, and at the same time, to be part of a process he has developed in

giving and sharing with other people. It is a spiritual event, not a social event. Therefore, you are part of what happens in Rikhia. However, in Bhuj it is a social event, not a spiritual event.

Definitely, a lot of change has taken place in the area where Paramahamsaji now lives. When Sivananda Math first started working there in 1990, the area was considered to be one of the poorest in India, without any facilities. These people, the weaker section of society, were neglected by the government. They had no resources with which to build their lives. When we first went there, we gave gifts and the people could not believe that good quality clothes existed in the world. They could not believe that there were toys and dolls and chocolates in the world. One child who received a Barbie doll was mesmerized, because her playthings were mud, earth, stone and wood. When the children were given chocolate, their faces looked as if they had been transported to heaven, because their usual sweet was only a pinch of sugar. When we gave gifts to the women, they would come separately because four or five of them were sharing one sari. But today you will see prosperity in that region.

Healthcare is provided free of cost. We have successfully eradicated TB from twenty-one villages. Now we are including people from other districts and villages. The children look bright, healthy, clean, vibrant and alive. Previously, they had no hope. Death used to dance before their eyes, but today the sun shines in their eyes. We have constructed many homes for the homeless without asking anything in return. Now they are exposed to different cultures from around the world – arts, sciences, music, dance and literature. In the past, the farms produced only one crop a year during the monsoon season. Today the land produces three crops a year, which has brought prosperity.

Sivananda Math looks after the educational, health, employment and family needs. Paramahamsaji has a plan for each member of the family. Nobody is neglected. This is only the beginning. It is an experiment which will evolve in the course of time. At first the people would look at us with

fearful eyes, but today they acknowledge with gratitude the contribution of Sivananda Math. So, we can say that lives have been transformed, and that is the achievement of Sivananda Math.

Which dimensions the activities of Sivananda Math will take in the future, we cannot say. The vision of Paramahamsaji is not fixed. Rather it is an evolving, spontaneous and natural process, making friends with everyone – ‘a friend in need is a friend indeed.’

## Satsang 2

**Swamiji, you have spent considerable time in Australia, including a long period when you were a teenager. What are your fondest memories of Australia and what do you think are the distinguishing characteristics of yoga in Australia?**

I came to Australia for the first time in 1976 when I was sixteen years old and lived here for about a year. They were the early days of the foundation of the Satyananda Ashrams in Australia. But yoga had been introduced to Australia much before. In the old days, there were a few yoga teachers associated with Paramahamsaji, their spiritual master. Swami Gitananda from the Gita School of Yoga in Melbourne was one of Paramahamsaji's first disciples. Roma Blair, a yoga teacher, also became an initiate of Paramahamsaji and was called Swami Nirmalananda. John Mumford was a yoga teacher and he was initiated as Swami Anandakapila. The fourth one was Swami Saraswati, a beautician and yoga teacher, a person of many talents. These were the major people who introduced yoga to Australians.

It has to be remembered that these people were following their own systems of yoga, which they had perfected according to their experience and the understanding of yoga available in those days. In 1969, when Paramahamsaji came to the International Yoga Convention in Richmond organized by these yoga teachers, they felt the need to go beyond physical identification into the spiritual dimension of yoga. They took initiation from Paramahamsaji. Slowly,

a need was felt by a growing number of yoga practitioners, the first ones being Rishis Vivekananda and Hridayananda, who became one of the foundation stones for the growth of yoga in Australia.

Many people joined the bandwagon, and as Paramahamsaji says, “I started my journey alone, but the caravan kept on growing.” Eventually, the Satyananda Ashram was established at Mangrove Mountain, and in 1976 Paramahamsaji presided over the World Yoga Convention in Sydney. I came from South America for that convention. The moment I landed here I liked Australians, because I found them to be no nonsense people, with open and accepting natures. During my stay, I travelled around Australia, meeting yoga teachers and introducing the concepts of Satyananda Yoga.

The warm and accepting nature of Australians made yoga into a way of life, not as something to be practised in a classroom environment for one hour every week. Although we had ashrams around the world by then, they were city ashrams where people would come once a week for a yoga class, go back to work, return the following week for a class and go home. The introduction of a yogic lifestyle in an ashram environment was first conceived at Mangrove Mountain, which became a thriving establishment. There were about twenty-two ashrams throughout Australia and many yoga teachers teaching the basic system of Satyananda Yoga.

Recently, we have taken this yogic understanding to another level with the Satyananda Yoga Academy, and the experiment has been very successful. The depth of understanding of yoga in Australia does not exist anywhere else in the world. Paramahamsaji has said that although yoga took birth in India, it developed into a lifestyle in Australia. In this way, India and Australia share a very deep connection with each other. If we look at the International Yoga Fellowship or Satyananda Yoga community throughout the world today, we find that the majority of the teachers and practitioners, and even sannyasins, are Australians. In my experience the vibrant nature of Australians is the motivating factor in their life to take that bold first step, and I hope you do not

lose this trait. India is my right arm and Australia is my left arm. From Paramahamsaji's viewpoint, India is the head and Australia is the heart.

**Swamiji, you are the successor to Swami Satyananda, who is, in turn, the disciple of Swami Sivananda. How important is this link to tradition for you?**

Without tradition there is no survival in yoga, because it is the tradition which transmits the energy, which conveys the vision of the previous acharyas or siddhas or saints and becomes the pathway for the flow of that wisdom. Therefore, tradition can never be ignored. Another beautiful thing about tradition is that there comes a time when the gurus withdraw from normal day-to-day activities, when they stop being the teachers and become the inspirers. If we disconnect from the tradition, we will simply remain yoga teachers, but when we connect with the tradition, the inspiration flows.

Personal identification with an idol or with an ideal, which forms the basis of spiritual education, is found in tradition. Swami Sivananda was one of the great sages of the twentieth century. Swami Satyananda is one of the last siddhas of the previous millennium. When we have these two power centres to guide and inspire us to open up new dimensions of human experience through yoga, we can be sure that we are never going to stagnate on our journey. Tradition does not allow stagnation of spirit, as long as we remain connected to the true spirit of the tradition, but when we move away from the tradition, stagnation of spirit, ideas, belief and performance is visible. Today we are following vibrancy and vitality, which is an integral part of our yogic journey.

**What are some of the key characteristics that distinguish Satyananda Yoga from other systems of yoga?**

There are many gurus in the world who teach what they believe in, and their teachings become their philosophy which is based on their personal experience. Many yoga teachers and gurus have tried to develop their system to its maximum potential, but as not everybody fits into the framework of

one's personal experience, they have not been successful. Eventually, they come back to the basic principles of yoga by teaching or speaking about hatha yoga, bhakti yoga, raja yoga, kriya yoga or kundalini yoga. When a guru is able to place aside his personal experiences and, without imposing his own philosophy, create a practical system which allows everybody to discover their own nature according to their state of evolution, the followers are allowed to grow from the point where they are in life.

Paramahamsaji has been very clear in these matters. Those of you who knew him in the past, when he was working as a teacher, would have noticed that he was totally focused on how to develop yoga. In his early writings or teachings, he never spoke about religion or spirit; he never spoke about God. He never spoke on subjects other than yoga. He did not influence our approach to yoga by incorporating his own personal experience. Rather he allowed us the freedom to experience yoga as it would evolve naturally.

In the beginning, people used to think that Swami Satyananda was only a yoga teacher. But now that he has retired from active teaching, from administration, travelling and speaking to people about yoga, he is talking about his spiritual experiences. We see that beauty in his nature and personality. Whenever he talks about his experiences or achievements, he says, "This has been my understanding. You develop in your own way. I have connected with people, with God, with the universe, with yoga in my own manner. You have to discover your own way of connecting. Don't go by my understanding and experience. Remember that the aim is connection, but how I connected was appropriate for me. How you connect will be the appropriate way for you." Through his actions and ideas, he continues to inspire us and to show us there are higher dimensions to life other than simply taking birth, living and dying without a trace.

In the yoga system he developed, he took a holistic approach to life. He did not incorporate religious concepts or philosophical ideas as a way of inner transformation. He provided very specific, precise and sequentially graded



techniques of meditation, which he discovered from the tantras. The teaching and stages of antar mouna, ajapa japa, chidakasha dharana and other techniques indicates that he has emphasized self-awareness as a prerequisite to yoga, not mechanical movement of body and mind. He has emphasized adjustment with an understanding of different situations in life. He has emphasized that you become the *drashta*, the seer, of yourself.

A visionary is not one who is able to see the future, but one who is able to see himself. A visionary is not one who plants the seed, sits back and waits for the tree to give fruit. A visionary is one who plants the seed and looks after it to ensure that it grows properly. If this is the concept of a visionary being, the *drashta*, it indicates that for every positive attainment there has to be effort.

Therefore, the hallmark of Satyananda Yoga has been the ability to bring together head, heart and hands. When head and heart unite, an ordinary moment can become divine. To experience the growth of the total human personality by developing the positive nature, by bringing together in confidence the head, heart and hands has been the thrust of Paramahamsaji's work and teaching. His inspiration came from Swami Sivananda, when he said in a cryptic form that it is possible to convert an ordinary life into a divine life. Paramahamsaji translated Swami Sivananda's idea into a practical form. Those who have truly followed this process of yoga have attained the experience of beauty, simplicity, innocence and purity of being.

**Yoga has become very popular in Western countries. What do you think are the reasons for this?**

Yoga has become popular throughout the world. Western countries have accepted yoga. Asian countries are adopting yoga. Middle Eastern countries are accepting yoga. The reason is that we have realized that we cannot manage confusing and conflicting situations while living in a normal way. People have not been able to provide us with solutions and answers. In many countries of the world, the basic belief is

that Indians have all the solutions to the meaning of life, but this is not true. Out of one billion people in India, thousands have established themselves as masters, providing solutions to all of our problems, but only ten are real gurus.

We have never tried to do that. In fact, when people come to me and say, “Swamiji, I am having this problem, what can I do for it?” I say to them, “Don’t come to me with problems, come to me with solutions. You know how you are facing your problem. Think about ways you can solve the problem, have ten options, and think about which one is appropriate. If you are confused, then come to me and I’ll tell you which solution might be better.”

This has been one of the reasons for the acceptance of yoga throughout the world. Last year, we established our first yoga centre in the Islamic world in Iran. Thirty-six people, medical professionals, professors, directors of the National Federation of Yoga and officials from the Department of Education and Culture, spent six weeks at Ganga Darshan, undergoing training as yoga teachers and yoga therapists. In May 2002 they are hosting the first national yoga conference in Iran.

We have a yoga centre in Morocco, too. Previously, people thought that yoga was part of a religion or contradictory to their beliefs, converting them to Hinduism or this or that ‘ism’. That is finished. Yoga has now been established as a science which promotes health, peace, tranquillity, human creativity and understanding, and teaches us how to adjust with life so that we are free from the negative influences of our environment. This is the reason why yoga is now being accepted throughout the world, not as a spiritual or a philosophical subject, but as a science of life.

### **If you separate yoga from Indian culture, what remains?**

Only yoga will remain. Yoga is not Indian, that is a misconception. There is ample evidence that five to six thousand years ago, in South America, Scandinavian countries, Egypt, many African countries and many Eastern countries, yoga was practised as we practise it today, in the

form of meditation, including trataka, yantra, mandala, asana, pranayama and shatkarma. In the course of time, maybe due to invasions, natural calamities or political factors, yoga faded into the background and slowly disappeared from other civilizations. The same also happened in India. But there was a group of people, sadhus and sannyasins, who preserved the integrity and knowledge of yoga for many generations. When the time was right, these people revived yoga. Although today we believe that yoga comes from India, India only gets the credit for preserving the science of yoga, which is the heritage of humanity.

As such, 'Indian-ness' has nothing to do with yoga, just as 'Australian-ness' has nothing to do with yoga. They are two different things. I am an Indian, you are an Australian. We come together because of yoga. If it were not for yoga, we would not be here. If I were talking religion, you would not be here. If you were talking religion, I would not be here. Yoga stands alone. When all our national identities dissolve, yoga will still be the same. If there is an increase in national identities, it will still not make any difference. Yoga will still stand alone. Only yoga will remain.

### **How relevant are orange robes and red dots in Western countries?**

Not relevant at all. You have to understand that orange robes or red dots do not form part of yoga or the yogic experience. Yoga is a different subject altogether. Yoga deals with the development of human personality. Orange robes, red dots or other forms of tradition are totally separate from yoga. We are sannyasins. In 1976 during the World Yoga Convention, Paramahamsaji defined the meaning of sannyasa when he initiated the first twelve sannyasin disciples. He said, "Our responsibility is to preserve the *vidya*, yogic wisdom or knowledge, spiritual wisdom or knowledge. That's all."

Sannyasa is one of the most ancient systems in the world. In the modern day environment it is compared to the priesthood of different traditions. But becoming a sannyasin is not becoming a monk. Becoming a sannyasin means that

you recognize the role of spirituality in your social life, that apart from working for your own satisfaction, you devote more time to helping others to grow. It is a very strong identity.

Throughout the world, people generally feel that yoga and geru robes are associated because yoga was first propagated by swamis. But this not an accurate association. Once there are enough yoga teachers, swamis are no longer interested and you will no longer find a person in geru on the street. If you ask the sannyasins if they are interested in passing their lives as yoga teachers, they will say no, they are only doing it as a duty. If you ask them what their interest is in life, they will say, "Spiritual development."

By following a lifestyle which allows one to come closer to one's own spirit or nature, or by identifying with the spiritual nature, which is internal and abstract, the beginning of that identification takes place by becoming one with a tradition that evokes that response of spiritual discovery. As sannyasins, we are not yoga teachers. We are people who are trying to discover our own spiritual roots. Yoga and sannyasa are two separate paths. Sannyasins can use the techniques and principles of yoga to deepen their awareness of spiritual life, but in order to practise yoga, sannyasa is not important or necessary. Yoga stands alone without the prop of any tradition, belief or philosophy. We use yoga to help understand ourselves better. That's all.

## Satsang 3

**Swamiji, you have been instrumental in founding Bihar Yoga Bharati, the world's first modern university dedicated to yoga. This has made the riches of yoga accessible and available at university level. Some might say, "Yoga is not academic." How would you respond?**

People who say that have no understanding of yoga. From our perspective, academic knowledge is what we study at school, at college, at university. There are two types of knowledge: spiritual and empirical. The existing education system is oriented only towards understanding external life. Whether it is maths, physics, science, arts or commerce, the subjects deal with the environment in which we live, the world of which we are a part, the country where we are, or are tools which can be useful to advance in society.

There is another dimension – spiritual education, which is not philosophical or ideological. Spiritual education is imbibing the samskaras. We do not teach asana and pranayama as physical exercises. Rather we teach asana, pranayama and concentration and relaxation techniques to young students in order to improve the quality of their mind and to give them a deeper understanding of how their mind relates to their family, friends, society and the world. This yogic education gives them an insight into how this relationship takes place, and this insight is known as samskara.

Children lack samskaras. The education at school, college and university is not the one which creates your personality.

What you imbibe from your parents and your culture defines what your personality will be. Before the birth of a child, by looking at the mother's behaviour and mentality or at the parental interaction, one can tell how the child will grow up in the future, whether he will be a saint or a criminal. Samskara is a very subtle archetypal imprint which we lack in our life today. We lack internal discipline and understanding.

There are people holding PhD degrees who do not know anything about themselves. They do not know how to manage their stress, and they resort to tranquillizers, drugs and alcohol or other methods of therapy and relaxation to find happiness, relaxation, contentment and peace. It becomes very difficult for them to internalize themselves and find their internal source of balance. Often uneducated people have the right samskara in their nature, behaviour, attitude and outlook on life, even more than highly qualified and educated degree holders.

Yoga does not believe in rights; yoga believes in responsibilities. Rights are the outcome of understanding and knowing your responsibilities. You cannot claim your rights. When you understand your responsibilities, you will know what your rights are. Understanding which is spontaneous, natural and not crammed is a samskara.

Yoga philosophy talks of the relationship an individual being has with the environment, universe and God. Yoga psychology provides us with tools to manage the distractions and defences within our mind and heart. Applied yoga teaches us how we can harmonize our environment and promote positive virtues and qualities in our life, whether through health, sports, management of addictions, etc.

Yoga ecology teaches us how to live in harmony with nature, to maintain the balance of nature and the balance within ourselves. We are too used to comforts. Our bodies have become weak because we live contrary to the principles of nature. Comfort is a good thing, but it should not be overutilized. It exists to help us manage conditions and situations which we cannot normally manage for various reasons. But to create more comfort, we go against natural

principles and laws. Only when we can live in harmony with ourselves and nature, can we experience the spiritual dimension.

This is the process of re-educating the self. In today's world, people understand academic language. Therefore, the need to establish a yoga university was felt. Swami Sivananda first conceived of a yoga university. Swami Satyananda carried forward the vision of a yoga university when he created Ganga Darshan. When he left, the choice came to me. I could have simply ignored the university aspect and maintained the status quo by simply maintaining a good yoga institute, but I felt that something was destined to happen. Destiny alters a person's actions. Suddenly, from nowhere the idea came, "Let us have a university." When it was established, Paramahamsaji said, "You have fulfilled the vision of Swami Sivananda and my vision."

Then I realized that I was only a tool, a medium by which destiny had fulfilled its role. It was not my choice, not my will, not my desire. For this reason tradition is important, because visions which motivate and inspire people are not always written in black and white. Rather, destiny gives each individual a vision and a mission in life, if we are open to it.

**Swami Satyananda once said that it is difficult for ashrams to work in the West. Satyananda Yoga in Australia currently has two large residential centres which owe much in the way they function to the legacy from the ashram tradition. How do cultural differences impact on these centres and where do you see these centres heading in the future?**

Swami Satyananda encouraged the establishment and formation of ashrams wherever possible. Even in Australia, he said we should have ashrams. They should be places where one has to work hard, physically, mentally emotionally and spiritually. The ground has to be broken. In order for a seed to sprout, the shell has to be broken. An ashram provides the opportunity to break the shell of our limited understanding and restrictive nature. An ashram is an ideal ground where we confront ourselves, our egos, our nature and our mind,

where we are aware of our own reactions and strengths and weaknesses. Of course, too many ashrams are not necessary. It is no use having one hundred ashrams when one can do the job. In the heyday of Satyananda Yoga in Australia, there were twenty-two ashrams and many yoga teachers spread throughout Australia. But now we simply want to build up the two main ones: Mangrove and Rocklyn.

The foundation of an ashram is discipline of the mind. The routine in an ashram helps to discipline the mind. Why do we practise mouna? Mouna is a discipline to help the mind. Why do we have to wake up at a certain time and go to a yoga class or do chanting, or do this, or do that? Given freedom you can do that whenever you wish, you don't have to follow a particular routine. But when we do it together at a specific time, we build up an energy which supports the attainment of inner peace and discipline. Why do we say lights out at a certain time? Why don't we allow smoking and drinking? Following the disciplines helps to regulate the vrittis of the mind.

These disciplines and routines evoke a sense of balance, purity, harmony and integrity with other people, with the environment and with the energies around the place. This connection is not based on the normal habits which dominate our life, but on the cultivation of positive and better habits that can help us grow. Therefore, ashrams are important. But at the same time, not too many are required. If you can imbibe the training and discipline of the ashram, then wherever you go in the world, you are a living representative of the ashram. You become a living, walking ashram in your personal life. And that's what all of you are becoming, gradually and slowly, learning how to control your own horses, knowing when the donkeys are crossing the road, and knowing not to go that way.

When 'donkeys' cross your mind, don't fight with them. Otherwise they'll kick you and you will feel pain and suffering. Know when to stop; know when to move. You do not drive in fourth gear all the time. There are times when you have to put on the brakes, times when you have to change gears, times



when you have to go into neutral, times when you stop, times when you have to drive very fast to get away from things. Just as you use survival techniques in the outside world, ashram training is a personal, internal survival technique.

**Swami Satyananda has moved on from being the vigorous developer of Satyananda Yoga which systematically integrates many aspects of yoga. Although this broad scope remains central to Satyananda Yoga teaching, he personally has moved on and is now becoming known as a great bhakta. What do you see as the essence of his path now? What is the relevance of bhakti yoga in the West?**

Bhakti yoga is a misunderstood yoga. Bhakti is equated with a religious attitude or behaviour, but it is not that. Raja yoga is management of the mind and has eight limbs. Bhakti yoga is management of the emotions and has nine limbs. The head is not the ultimate in a person's life. It is the heart that provides the final answers. It has been stated by different spiritual and religious traditions that God resides in the heart of everyone.

On our yogic journey, we search for God in our heads. Pratyahara works with the head. Dharana works with the head. Jnana works with the head. Samadhi works with the head. We have completely ignored the heart. Although we talk about it, we don't know what the heart is. We equate it with love, but that is only one expression of the heart, just as thought is only one expression of the mind. Compassion is only one expression of the heart, just as desire is only one expression of the mind. Sensitivity is another expression of the heart, just as dreams and fantasies can be an expression of the mind. Ego is an expression of the mind. Egolessness and simplicity is an expression of the heart.

When we try to experience compassion and love, the mind interferes. These experiences become conditioned. We experience conditioned love, which has a beginning and an end; it has a drive, a desire, motivation and some gain. It is the same with compassion and every other positive quality. We can never experience the true nature of the heart. When the heart becomes alive, then the body becomes the heart.

When you look at Swami Satyananda now, all you can see in his eyes is love. In his actions, all you will find is compassion. His body has the odour of love and compassion. He is an example of living at the level of the heart. We live at the level of the head and we are unable to move down, but when you live at the level of the heart, your being becomes divine and is transformed. That is bhakti.

The beginning of bhakti is the discovery of truth. The first limb of bhakti is not adoration, it is knowing right from wrong. It is being in close proximity to the truthful nature. It means throwing away all the masks that you wear during the day and during the course of your life to present yourself as a different person to others and also to yourself. Don't hide behind any mask, but know your truthful nature.

The second form of bhakti is identifying with the transcendental and positive nature governing the universe. The third form of bhakti is becoming egoless. It continues in this way until in the ninth stage of bhakti, where you are one with infinity. When we say God is one, we are saying God is infinite and infinite is one. The finite nature divides itself into many forms and shapes; it is subject to time, space and object; it gives us the understanding of the duality of the world. But unity is infinity, one, God, and that is experienced through bhakti.

You can see bhakti mirrored in the lives of the great saints of the sixteenth century – Mirabai, Chaitanya and Kabir. When Mira died, her body became light and the light dissolved into the image of Sri Krishna. Where did the physical body go? It was not a siddhi, not an occult power which transformed her body of blood and bones into pure light and dissolved into the idol of Sri Krishna. This event was witnessed by many people. When Chaitanya died, his body became one with the image of the Lord. When Kabir died, the Hindus said, “Kabir is our guru. We will cremate him.” The Muslims said, “Kabir is our prophet. We will bury him.” But when they removed the cloth covering the body, they found only flowers.

These events happened in recent history, it is not just a fantasy. Are these events miracles? Are they siddhis or occult

powers? To an ordinary person, it may seem like a miracle, and possibly the ultimate spiritual attainment. But for a yogi who has connected with the heart, the body is light, and they say, “Beam me up, God” and God takes them away. Therefore, bhakti is not adoration, not worship, not religious activity, but realizing the source of the divine nature that is within the hearts of everyone. By living that life, Paramahamsaji is not teaching bhakti, but has become an example of bhakti. If we can walk one step in that direction, we will attain something. Bhakti leads to purity. Bhakti leads to eradication of ego, ahamkara. Bhakti leads to understanding the inherent energy in matter and converting matter back into energy.

**Do you see the current work carried out by Sivananda Math and Swami Satyananda supporting the development of his poor village neighbours as having a relevance and relationship to the future of Satyananda Yoga generally?**

Sivananda Math is an organization which teaches how to manage the heart. The Satyananda Yoga tradition is an organization which teaches how to manage the mind. Both are compatible. It is not important what the organization is doing. It is important what you are doing — learning to give by opening the doors of your own heart. When you give, you receive more than you give. What you receive is not mental or intellectual, but an inner joy which uplifts you. Don't look at the organization. Look at the spirit that is moving these organizations and connect with that spirit. Once you are connected with that spirit, you will know that it is an integral part of the total vision of a saint.

**Do you see a place for yoga in social welfare and fostering the development of the disadvantaged in communities throughout the world? I am thinking of Swami Sivananda's 'serve, love, give, purify.'**

If you look at how yoga has been applied in various countries, you will know that yoga has many social applications. In Germany, there are life insurance companies which encourage people to practise yoga and give reduced premiums. Yoga

in the management of drug and alcohol addiction is now an accepted fact. It is a well known fact that yoga helps to manage negative behaviour in prisons, as well as to increase performance in different industries. Yoga to promote health and to assist the healing of body and mind is also a well-known fact.

When we reach out to the community through yoga, we are serving, giving them an indication that we love them. Otherwise we would simply use yoga for our personal emancipation, not caring about what happens in a prison, or in a detox centre. The moment you come to yoga is the moment you learn how to serve, how to love, how to give and how to purify yourself. Please remember that nothing is black and white. It is all experimental and you can increase that experience by having a deeper involvement with the yogic process.

### **Will the social welfare aspect becomes a priority for Satyananda Yoga?**

Priorities are decided by our own individual, independent minds. My priority and your priority may be different. Rather than priority, we should look at it as an outcome of natural growth. Where Sage Patanjali stops, Swami Sivananda continues. Sage Patanjali has defined eight limbs of yoga for personal understanding, awakening and realization. Swami Sivananda has defined another eight limbs to externalize the personal experience and convert that into action in the outer world.

Sage Patanjali says that yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi are the things you need to do to improve yourself. Swami Sivananda says: when you have done all that, then externalize the understanding and experience you have gained. Convert it into action through 'Serve, Love, Give, Purify, Be Good, Do Good, Meditate, Realize'. Therefore, the ashtanga yoga of Sivananda is the natural outcome of having perfected or having gone through the process of completing the ashtanga yoga of Sage Patanjali. For Satyananda Yoga, yoga is not an eight-fold path, but a sixteen-fold path with both systems complementing each other.

**Many practise yoga their whole lives, going through good and bad times. Others try yoga for a while and become disillusioned, for whatever reason, perhaps a falling out with a teacher or colleague or feeling unable to live up to self-imposed expectations. There is sometimes bitterness. What can be done?**

In such cases people have used yoga as a tool to manage and feed their own manifest egos and power trips. If yoga were practised with sincerity and in its entirety, this would not happen. In the beginning when you clean a pot, dirt comes to the surface. When you work with your personality, negative traits will come to the surface. But it is there that you have to learn how to become a drashta, and not be influenced by that negativity. If you can pass that critical stage, it is smooth sailing. But if you fail in that critical stage, you will be disillusioned, not with yoga but with yourself. Because you don't want to face the fact that you are disillusioned with yourself, you have to put the blame on something or someone. Human beings are very quick to blame others, but very weak when they need to look at themselves.

**What qualities or states should yoga students and practitioners aspire for in their interactions and relationships with each other? What should we expect of ourselves when dealing with others?**

In one word, understanding is the greatest quality. Love is a reaction to understanding. When you understand, you naturally love. When you don't understand, you don't like it. Therefore, understanding is the primary quality we should aspire for as a practitioner of yoga.

**I have heard you say on several occasions 'take responsibility'. What do you mean, and what are the implications if we are to take this as a principle into our lives?**

You have to be responsible for your own life. You are responsible for the mess you create and the joy you experience in your life. You have to understand that we have the force and power to become what we wish to become. The other

person does not ‘make us’ what we wish to become; we make ourselves what we wish to become. It is this recognition that is important when we have to become responsible for ourselves. We have to believe in our strengths. We have to connect with our positivity and creativity in order to let them not be simply ideas, but actual experience.

We have a responsibility towards ourselves and towards other people. The primary responsibility is to develop an understanding, and other responsibilities will be understood once we develop our understanding. In Sanskrit, responsibility is *kartavya* or duty. What is my duty to myself? What is my duty when I interact with others? Do I remain my cantankerous, arrogant, egotistical self? Or do I come down to your level and speak in your language and speak as your friend? What do I choose? That is what one has to think about. Responsibility or *kartavya* is not something that is taken from outside, but rather it is the result of knowing how to interact in the most appropriate way with other people. That is what we need to realize in order to become responsible.

**If we could paint a picture of Satyananda Yoga for Australia, or perhaps create it on the computer, what would this picture contain?**

Only a circle. You have a seed in your hand. You plant the seed and it grows into a tree. The tree has a trunk, branches, leaves and flowers. Is that the death of the seed? When the fruits appear, inside each one there is a seed with the same potential as the first seed. In yoga, evolution is recognized not as a linear process, but as a circular process. We go through the process of growth and realize our own true potential. Evolution is from seed to seed, not from tree to fruit. For this reason, a circle is enough to define the concept of yoga.

**Who is Satyananda Yoga for?**

All those who need yoga.

# Glossary

- Abhimana** – egoism, pride; identification with the body  
**Acharya** – attitude, lifestyle; established rule of conduct  
**Achetana** – unconscious  
**Adhara** – foundation, basis  
**Adharma** – disharmony, unrighteousness  
**Advaita Vedanta** – non-dualistic philosophy of Adi Shankaracharya based on experience of Brahman as the absolute reality  
**Ahamkara** – egoism; awareness of the existence of 'I'  
**Ahara** – craving food or nourishment; third basic instinct  
**Ahimsa** – absence of violence from within; abstaining from violence to others in thought, word and deed  
**Ajapa japa** – continuous, spontaneous repetition of mantra; meditation practice in which mantra is coordinated with the breath  
**Ajna chakra** – 'third eye'; psychic command centre, seat of intuition  
**Akasha** – element of ether, space  
**Anahata chakra** – psychic centre in the region of the heart, corresponding to the cardiac plexus in the physical body; centre of emotions  
**Ananda** – spiritual bliss  
**Anandamaya kosha** – body or dimension of bliss  
**Anga** – limb, part  
**Annamaya kosha** – sheath or body of matter and physical experience

**Antar darshan** – inner vision

**Anubhava** – direct perception or cognition; intuitive consciousness

**Anushasana** – laying down rules or precepts; harnessing, managing and directing the forces of the subtle personality; subtle discipline

**Aparigraha** – freedom from covetousness, non-possessiveness

**Aparokshanubhuti** – direct experience; state of intuitive experience

**Arjuna** – third Pandava, son of Indra and Kunti; in the *Bhagavad Gita* he received divine revelation from his guru, Sri Krishna

**Artha** – material need; accomplishment; one of the four purusharthas

**Artha shastras** – scriptural treatises on the principles of economics

**Asakti** – attachment

**Asana** – physical posture in which one is at ease and in harmony with oneself; third limb of Sage Patanjali's ashtanga yoga

**Ashram** – place of spiritual retreat and inner growth through internal and external labour

**Ashtanga yoga** – the eight limbs of yoga described by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*: yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, samadhi

**Ashuddha** – impure

**Asmita samadhi** – dissolution of the personal ego

**Asteya** – honesty, not stealing

**Atma** – pure consciousness which pervades everything; self, soul, spirit

**Atmabhava** – being one with all

**Atma vichara** – self-enquiry

**Avachetana** – subconscious

**Avidya** – absence of inner knowledge

**Bhagavad Gita** – 'divine song'; Sri Krishna's discourse on yoga delivered to Arjuna on the battlefield at the onset of the Mahabharata war

**Bhakti yoga** – channelling emotional energy towards a higher reality or purpose; a systematic path with nine stages which expand, strengthen and purify the emotions



**Bhavana** – intense inner feeling or subtle emotion, expression of the heart

**Bhaya** – fear; second basic instinct

**Bhokta** – one who enjoys

**Bhoota** – manifest element or state of existence

**Bija mantra** – seed mantra

**Bodhisattwa** – one whose essence is perfect knowledge; one who does not leave the body after reaching nirvana but remains to serve mankind

**Brahmacharya** – constant awareness of higher consciousness; continence

**Brahman** – eternal, omnipresent principle of existence or ultimate reality; ever expanding consciousness

**Buddhi** – higher intelligence, discrimination; intuitive aspect of mind

**Charaka Samhita** – ancient Indian treatise on ayurvedic principles

**Chakra** – ‘wheel’ or ‘vortex’; centre of energy or psychic centre in the subtle body

**Chetana** – consciousness; unmanifest aspect of consciousness and energy

**Chidakasha** – inner space visualized in meditation behind the closed eyes; mind conceived as all pervading space; space where the capacity for sense perception is internalized to observe the individual awareness

**Chitta** – individual consciousness, including the subconscious and unconscious layers of mind; storehouse of memories or samskaras

**Chitta shakti** – mental force governing the subtle dimensions

**Chitta vritti** – disposition or state of mind; inward working of the mind; mental fluctuation or modification

**Daharakasha** – lower or deep space, encompassing mooladhara, swadhisthana and manipura chakras

**Dakini** – the goddess in mooladhara

**Dakshina** – offering to the guru

**Dakshinachara** – the ‘right-hand’ path of tantra; path of pranic awakening; one of the five limbs of tantra

**Darshan** – inner vision, glimpse, knowing

**Desha** – place

**Devata** – divine being; illumined form

**Dharana** – concentration or complete attention; sixth limb of Sage Patanjali's ashtanga yoga

**Dharma** – duty, righteousness; one of the four purusharthas or goals to be fulfilled in life

**Dhyana** – meditation; seventh limb of Sage Patanjali's ashtanga yoga

**Diksha** – initiation

**Dosha** – three humours of the body: vata (wind), pitta (acidity) and kapha (phlegm)

**Drashta** – seer, witness, uninvolved observer

**Dukha** – unhappiness, suffering

**Dweshha** – repulsion, aversion, dislike

**Ekagra** – focused mind

**Ganga** – most sacred river in India; symbol of purity

**Grihastha** – householder

**Guna** – quality; three characteristics of creation: sattwa, raja and tamas

**Guru** – one who dispels the darkness of ignorance; teacher, preceptor

**Gurukul** – educational system of ancient India, where children lived in the ashram and were taught a comprehensive syllabus for life by the guru

**Hatha yoga** – system of yoga for attaining physical and mental purity and balancing the pranas in the body

**Havan** – fire ritual

**Himsa** – violence, harm

**Hiranyagarbha** – golden womb

**Hridayakasha** – psychic space of the heart centre, experienced between manipura and vishuddhi chakras, associated with anahata chakra

**Ichha shakti** – creative force or that desire which is the first manifestation of the greater mind

**Ida nadi** – channel of lunar energy between the left nostril and the base of the spine, running from mooladhara to ajna chakra, governing the left side of the body and the right side of the brain; passive force

**Indriya** – sensory organ  
**Ishta devata** – personal deity  
**Ishwara** – immortal, unchanging, transcendental reality governing creation  
**Jagrat** – waking state related to the conscious mind  
**Jara** – old age  
**Jignasu** – spiritual seeker; preliminary stage of sannyasa  
**Jivatma** – individual soul  
**Jnana** – higher knowledge, cognition or wisdom  
**Jnanendriyas** – five organs of perception: ears, skin, eyes, tongue and nose  
**Kala** – time  
**Kali** – goddess of destruction; divine mother; primal manifestation of Shakti who destroys time, space and object  
**Kama** – need for emotional fulfilment; desire for sensual enjoyment considered to be one of the four purusharthas  
**Kamana** – passion, desire  
**Kama Sutras** – ancient Indian treatise on the erotic arts  
**Karma** – action and result  
**Karma yoga** – action performed with meditative awareness; yogic path of selfless service; gaining immunity to karma by dedicating one's actions to God  
**Karmendriyas** – five physical organs of action: vocal cords, hands, feet, genital organ and anus  
**Karta** – doer  
**Kartavya** – performing action with knowledge  
**Kosha** – body or realm of experience or existence  
**Krishna, Sri** – eighth incarnation of Vishnu, who lived in Dwapara yuga, 5,000 years ago; his teachings to his disciple Arjuna are immortalized in the *Bhagavad Gita*  
**Kriya shakti** – power of acting  
**Kriya yoga** – practices of kundalini yoga designed to speed up human evolution  
**Krodha** – anger, aggression  
**Kshipta** – dissipated or scattered state of mind  
**Kundalini yoga** – path of yoga which awakens the dormant spiritual force  
**Lila** – play; activity of prakriti and its three gunas

**Loka** – plane of existence

**Mahabharata** – ancient Indian epic, involving the history and consequences of the great battle between the Kaurava and Pandava princes

**Mahaprana** – prana in its cosmic, unmanifest aspect

**Maithuna** – physical union; fusion of male and female energies

**Manas** – finite, rational mind, concerned with senses, thought and counter-thought

**Manipura chakra** – psychic/pranic centre situated behind the navel in the spinal column, corresponding to the solar plexus and associated with vitality and energy

**Manomaya kosha** – sheath or body of mental experience

**Mantra** – subtle sound vibration; process of tantra for liberating energy from the limitations of mundane awareness and expanding consciousness

**Matri shakti** – feminine force

**Maya** – cause of the phenomenal world; illusion

**Moha** – delusion

**Moksha** – liberation from the wheel of birth and death

**Moodha** – dull, confused, forgetful state of mind

**Mooladhara chakra** – psychic and pranic centre in the body, situated in the perineum in men and the cervix in women and connected to the coccygeal plexus; seat of kundalini

**Mukti** – liberation

**Nada** – subtle sound vibration

**Nadi** – channel of energy, psychic current

**Nashwara** – mortal, changeable

**Nidra** – deep sleep; unconscious state

**Nishkama** – selfless, desireless

**Niyama** – second limb of Sage Patanjali's ashtanga yoga; five rules of conduct pertaining to individual discipline: shaucha (purity), santosha (contentment), tapas (austerity), swadhyaya (self-study), Ishwara pranidhana (surrender to a higher principle)

**Paramartha** – highest truth

**Paramatma** – supreme soul

**Patala** – seven planes of consciousness below mooladhara chakra

**Patanjali, Sage** – author of the *Yoga Sutras*; an ancient rishi who codified the system of raja yoga and propounded ashtanga yoga

**Pingala nadi** – major pranic channel of solar energy between the right nostril and the base of the spine, running from mooladhara to ajna chakra, governing the right side of the body and the left side of the rain; vital force

**Poorna** – whole, complete, fulfilled

**Prajna** – higher wisdom, source of individual revelation; unconscious mind

**Prakasha** – luminosity; internal or subtle illumination; essence of sattwa guna

**Prakriti** – manifest and unmanifest nature composed of the three gunas; vehicle of purusha

**Pramana** – knowledge based on direct cognition

**Prana** – vital energy force

**Prana pratishtha** – tantric ritual in which the vital force within an object is awakened

**Pranamaya kosha** – sheath or body of pranic energy

**Pranava** – Aum/Om; primal sound vibration

**Pranayama** – systematic series of techniques using the breath to control the flow of prana in the body; expanding the range of prana shakti

**Pratyahara** – process of withdrawing and freeing the mind from the domination of the senses and external objects; limb of Sage Patanjali's ashtanga yoga

**Pratyaya** – seed or impression in the field of consciousness

**Prokshana** – sprinkling water to purify the place of worship

**Purusha** – pure, cosmic consciousness, masculine force

**Purushartha** – human effort; four goals to be fulfilled in life: artha (wealth), kama (love), dharma (duty) and moksha (liberation)

**Raga** – attraction, like

**Raja yoga** – eightfold path of yoga classified by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*; yoga of awakening the psychic awareness and faculties through meditation

**Rajas** – vitality, dynamism, motivation

**Rishi** – seer, realized sage

**Sadhana** – spiritual practice or discipline performed regularly for the attainment of inner experience and self-realization

**Sahasrara chakra** – highest psychic centre, located at the crown of the head; abode of Shiva or superconsciousness

**Sakama** – motivated by selfish desire

**Samadhi** – culmination of meditation; final step of raja yoga

**Samagri** – collection of substances offered to the sacred fire during havan

**Sambandh** – contact or communication

**Samkhya** – one of the six systems of Indian philosophy; philosophical basis of the system of yoga; philosophy underlying the tantras

**Samskara** – mental impression stored in the subtle body as an archetype

**Sanatana dharma** – system of eternal values underlying vedic culture

**Sandhya** – early morning or evening twilight

**Sankalpa** – positive resolve, will

**Sannyasa** – renunciation of the world, possessions and attachments

**Santosh** – contentment, satisfaction

**Sanyam** – balanced attitude, restraint, harmonious control

**Satguna** – positive quality

**Satkarma** – auspicious actions

**Satsang** – gathering of spiritually minded people in which the ideals and principles of truth are discussed; association with the wise and the good

**Satya loka** – highest of the lokas

**Sattwa** – harmony, equilibrium, luminosity, purity

**Satyam** – truth, unchanging principle

**Shakti** – primal energy; feminine aspect of creation and divinity; vehicle of consciousness

**Shanti** – inner peace

**Shaucha** – cleanliness of body and mind; external and internal purity

**Shishya** – disciple

**Shiva** – ‘auspicious one’; name of the god of the Hindu trinity, who is entrusted with the work of destruction; lord of yogis

who is said to dwell on Mount Kailash; destroyer of the ego and duality; symbol of cosmic consciousness

**Shivam** – auspiciousness

**Shoonya** – void; state of absolute nothingness in which no object is experienced

**Shuddhata** – purity

**Siddhanta** – established end, culmination of the human effort to experience the transcendental beyond time, space and object

**Siddhantachara** – tantric path of spiritual attainment

**Smriti** – memory

**Srishti** – creation

**Sthitaprajna** – stable wisdom, one who is firmly established in superconsciousness

**Sukha** – happiness

**Sundaram** – beautiful

**Swabhava** – one's own nature

**Swadhisthana chakra** – psychic/pranic centre situated at the base of the spinal column, associated with the sacral plexus; the storehouse of subconscious impressions

**Swadhyaya** – self-study, continuous awareness of what one is doing; education of the self

**Swapna** – subconscious mind, state of dreaming

**Swara** – breathing cycle; flow of breath in the nostrils; sound or tone

**Swatantra** – freedom

**Tamas** – inertia, stability, stagnation, unwillingness to change

**Tanmatra** – subtle essence of the five elements

**Tantra** – expansion of consciousness and liberation of energy and consciousness from matter; ancient universal science dealing with transcendence of the gross nature from the present level of evolution to the highest state of human attainment

**Tapasya** – practice of austerity, self-discipline and purification

**Tattwa** – essential element, essence

**Trataka** – to gaze steadily; a concentration practice

**Turiya** – superconsciousness; fourth dimension of consciousness transcending the waking, dreaming and deep sleep states

**Udasina** – indifferent; not attached to the senses

**Upasana** – worshipping or contemplating on God or a deity

**Vairagya** – dispassion, non-attachment

**Vamachara** – the tantric path of awakening and controlling the subtle forces of the mind; left-hand path of tantra

**Vasana** – mental disposition; seed desire

**Vedachara** – the tantric path of wisdom; living according to eternal human values; one of the five limbs of tantra

**Vedanta** – one of the six systems of vedic philosophy, which deals with the transcendental and manifest nature of consciousness; philosophy of realization of Brahman

**Vidya** – inner knowledge, realization

**Vijnanamaya kosha** – astral or psychic (higher mental) sheath or body

**Vikalpa** – confusion

**Vikshipta** – dissipated, oscillating mind

**Viparyaya** – false knowledge

**Vishad** – unhappiness, dejection, despair

**Vishnu** – preserver of the universe

**Vishuddhi chakra** – psychic/pranic centre located at the throat pit, particularly connected with purification and communication

**Viveka** – discrimination; right knowledge or understanding

**Vritti** – mental fluctuation, wave or pattern, modification arising in consciousness

**Vyadhi** – disease, sickness

**Vyoma panchaka dharana** – techniques of concentration on the five subtle spaces within consciousness

**Yajna** – sacrifice or sacrificial rite; offering oblations to the fire

**Yama** – third limb of Sage Patanjali's ashtanga yoga, five self-restraints or rules of conduct pertaining to ethical perfection: ahimsa (non-violence), satya (truth), asteya (non-stealing), brahmacharya (continence) and aparigraha (non-covetousness)

**Yoga nidra** – 'psychic sleep'; pratyahara practice inducing deep relaxation

**Yoga Sutras** – ancient authoritative text on raja yoga by Sage Patanjali

**Yogachara** – the path of unity between body, mind and spirit; one of the five limbs of tantra

**Yuga** – aeon, age



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**Swami Niranjanananda** was born in Rajnandgaon (Chhattisgarh) in 1960. Guided from birth by his guru, Swami Satyananda Saraswati, he came to live at the Bihar School of Yoga in Munger at the age of four where he received training in yogic and spiritual sciences through yoga nidra. In 1971 he was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa, and for twelve years he lived overseas, acquiring an understanding of different cultures and helping further his guru's mission to spread yoga 'from door to door and shore to shore'.



He returned to India in 1983 to guide the activities of Bihar School of Yoga, Sivananda Math and Yoga Research Foundation at Ganga Darshan. In 1990 he was initiated as a paramahansa sannyasin and in 1993 anointed spiritual preceptor in succession to Swami Satyananda Saraswati. He established Bihar Yoga Bharati, the first university of yoga, in 1994, Yoga Publications Trust in 2000, and a children's yoga movement, Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal, in 1995. He travelled extensively to guide seekers around the world until 2009, when he received the command to commence a new phase of sannyasa life.

In 2010, he established Sannyasa Peeth, to enable seekers to experience the spiritual and cultural traditions of India in their essence. The year marked his entry into a phase of higher sadhana and tirtha yatra.

In 2013, he conducted the World Yoga Convention in Munger to celebrate the golden jubilee of the Bihar School of Yoga, and launched a new era of yogic renaissance. In 2013 he also commenced the arduous panchagni sadhana. In 2014, he embarked on a Bharat Yatra, an all-India tour, transmitting the gift of yoga to all. Since then, Swami Niranjan has been working to develop the next stage of yogic training and teaching, and has initiated several programs to help people deepen their experience of yoga and imbibe the traditional wisdom. Simultaneously, he has revived various ancient knowledge systems and practices of India.

In 2017, he received the Padma Bhushan, the third highest civilian award given by the Government of India, for the outstanding work in the field of yoga.

Author of many classic books on yoga and other spiritual streams, Swami Niranjan is a magnetic source of wisdom on all aspects of yogic philosophy, practice and lifestyle. He ably combines tradition with modernity as he continues to work for his guru's mission.





“Yoga has been defined as union, but before we can experience union we have to connect. Connection is the definition of yoga for the new millennium. Yoga is not taking a different direction. It is the human perception that has to take the appropriate step. Yoga is an experiment to change our perception and convert our understanding into applied wisdom. Yoga gives us the awareness that it is now time to act and take responsibility for ourselves and others.”

The fourth volume of *Yoga Sadhana Panorama* presents discourses and satsangs given by Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati in France, Greece, Wales, Spain, Australia and India in 2000, 2001 and 2002. These teachings contain a wealth of information and practical insights relevant to all yogic aspirants seeking guidance and direction in the twenty-first century.



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